Interview with Donald F. McHenry

The Association for Diplomatic Studies and Training Foreign Affairs Oral History Project

AMBASSADOR DONALD F. MCHENRY

Interviewed by: Charles Stuart Kennedy

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[Note: Ambassador McHenry did not edit this transcript.]

Q: I wonder if you could give me a bit about your background—when and where you were born and grew up. A little about that, so we can get an idea of who you are.

MCHENRY: I was born in St. Louis, Missouri, and grew up in East St. Louis, Illinois. It's one of those strange stories of American life. I was born in St. Louis because of the hospitals in East St. Louis were segregated. When I was sworn in the first time, as the deputy U.S. representative to the Security Council, I had both the senators from Missouri and the senators from Illinois present, both laying claim. Now the truth is, I stayed in Missouri only for that period of time that my mother was in the hospital. The rest of my life was in Illinois. I guess in today's time, that would mean that I would have stayed in Missouri for about a day and a half. But at that time, it was much longer.

Q: My wife was born in Kansas City, Missouri, but is really a New Englander. Her father just happened to be there.

MCHENRY: I grew up in Illinois, went to schools in Illinois. Went to college in Illinois, went to graduate school there.

Q: East St. Louis was a pretty rough place, wasn't it? I don't know the place, but somebody said it was.

MCHENRY: Well, it was a pretty rough place, and it still is. I remember, at that period of time when one was impressed with anything that was in a book, reading that it was “hell town on the river,” or “the world's most corrupt city,” or, later on, I referred to it as a good place to be from. It was an industrial town, on the railroad going along the Mississippi up to Chicago. A lot of unskilled labor there in the steel mills and the meat-slaughtering industry. And it was a corrupt town, with its share of gangsters and gambling and so forth. Not the world's best place to grow up in; though it was, while I was a child, much better than it is today.

Q: Did it reach out and hit you, or were you able to maneuver? Did your family keep you away from the bad influences?

MCHENRY: Well, first, it was much better than it is today. It has suffered from the loss of all of that industry that was there. It moved south or out of the country, or it got modernized in some kind of way. And when all of that industry left, what was left behind was a large pool of unskilled workers. And the area has deteriorated and deteriorated. I think now it must be just half of its population: down from about 100,000 people to somewhere around 50,000 people. Now some of that's gone out into the suburbs.

No, I grew up in a family where my mother was very strong. My parents were divorced when I was four or five. I don't really ever remember living with my father. Some people have memories that go back to three and two, but mine doesn't go back very far. There were three of us, and my mother worked day and night. She worked all day, and then, I remember, during the war, she'd go off in the evening, about four o'clock, and work the four-to-eleven shift in the munitions factory.

But we were protected in our little cocoon at our house. We were exposed to books, and we went across the river to the concerts and the museums. And every time summer came along, we'd scrape up a little money and go off to Chicago or someplace, which exposed us.

And I don't think that was unusual. Someone was saying to me the other day that if you made list of the people who came along, roughly my age (four or five years older, or four or five year younger), it's amazing what that little town produced. And it is. The man who is rumored to be the State Department's new legal advisor, Conrad Harper, is from East St. Louis. We were in high school together. He got out of there and went off to New York and became a New York lawyer.

It was not an easy situation, but if you worked at it, you could succeed.

Q: Well, you graduated from high school and then went to the university in Illinois.

MCHENRY: To Illinois State, on a state scholarship. Every county had so many scholarships available for high school graduates who were in the whatever percentage it was of the class. And I had one of those. It didn't cover room and board, but it did cover tuition. And at the time, we rented our books; you just went over and gave them three or four dollars, and you got all the books you needed. You had to turn them in at the end, but we didn't have that big expense. I would say that the big expenses we had were room and board and getting back and forth to school, which we did on the Greyhound bus, for the fall and vacations.

Q: Did you get any feel for foreign affairs at this time? Was this a part of your interest? How did this develop?

MCHENRY: You know, I've been asked a number of times, “How did somebody from a backward little place like East St. Louis end up in foreign affairs?” As best I can put it together, I would say this: In 1948, just as I was getting ready to go off to high school,

Adlai Stevenson came back to Illinois to run for governor. He'd been at the United Nations, been in the State Department. He had this marvelous international background. And, for me, he had the additional allure, if you will, of coming in and cleaning up the gambling and cleaning up the corruption.

Q: Of course, this was all-pervasive as you were growing up, so you knew about this.

MCHENRY: Oh, yes. Well, if you were reasonably well informed, you knew about it.

I remember, in 1947, there was this huge place built reasonably close to the river, which was going to be a gambling palace. Bowman's, they called it. And it was situated there so that the people from St. Louis (who of course couldn't engage in all this kind of stuff) could get over the river quickly and do their gambling and go back. Well, they'd built this huge place; Stevenson was elected; the place never opened up. He closed it down.

My point is that I was rather impressed at that time with his coming along. And I was editor of the school newspaper and the yearbook, and engaged in public speaking. When I went off to college, I was on the debate team, and every other year, we had an international subject, and alternate years, we had a domestic subject. So it wasn't very difficult to built this interest in foreign affairs.

I had a competing interest, which was in rhetoric and public address. And over the years, I had to decide which one of those I wanted to do.

Q: Where would rhetoric and public address lead, towards politics?

MCHENRY: Oh, it could lead towards politics or the law, its background, or being a university professor (I was doing classical rhetoric). But I had to decide which one of those fields I wanted to pursue. And, frankly, I couldn't decide, so in my Master's Degree, I have a double major: one in international affairs, and one in rhetoric and public address.

Q: Where did you get your Master's Degree?

MCHENRY: Southern Illinois.

But I became interested in foreign affairs, and when I had finished my Master's, I struck off for Washington.

Q: Just to get a little feel for the times, what was the attitude you were getting from the academic world towards the United Nations? This has waxed and waned over time.

MCHENRY: It's waxed and waned, but this was a period of time when there was great hopefulness towards the United Nations.

When I was still an undergraduate in college and we would travel around the place on our various debate trips, I remember seeing some of the billboards, particularly in Indiana: “Get the United States out of the United Nations, and the United Nations out of the United States!”

I used to listen to the news all the time (I still do; I keep an all-news station running all the time), and I remember Gabriel Heater coming on the air, and he would say, “The Russians just cast their...” and he would keep up with the number of vetoes in the Security Council.

Q: We took great pride in the fact that we never used the veto.

MCHENRY: And we didn't use the veto until the Nixon administration, about 1971. We used it on Southern Rhodesia, for the first time. There are reasons why we could afford not to.

But I think the general attitude in the country was very hopeful towards the United Nations; a feeling that we were the good guys in the organization, and that we were being held up by the bad guys.

Q: I'm a little older than you, and I remember that when I got out of college in 1950, this was the big hope. The United Nations was very much the wave of the future.

Well, you came to Washington when?

MCHENRY: I came to Washington in 1959.

Q: What were you doing?

MCHENRY: I came to Washington with very little. I packed up my little Renault Dauphine with all my earthly belongings, and I was coming out here to go to school, here at Georgetown, to work on a Ph.D. I was hoping that once I got here, I would get some kind of work, because that was the only way that I was going to end up in school. I'd been admitted. I was gambling that I could find some kind of work in the day, because most of the graduate courses at that time were, and I guess still are, at night. I ended up, in fact, getting a job, teaching public speaking at Howard University.

Q: Ah, there's where your rhetoric kicked in.

MCHENRY: My rhetoric kicked in. I was offered a job as the assistant debate coach here at Georgetown, but it was going to take travel and too much time at night. So I went over to Howard, and I worked in the English Department, first as a public-speaking teacher, and then later I became the debate coach there. I stayed there for about three years and went to school at night.

Q: What were you getting your Ph.D. in at Georgetown?

MCHENRY: International affairs. But I never got it.

Q: What was the thrust of the Georgetown School of Foreign Service at that time?

MCHENRY: I wasn't in the School of Foreign Service. It doesn't offer a Ph.D. The only place that offered a Ph.D. when I was looking around, in what I wanted to study, was the Fletcher School at Tufts. Even SAIS at the time didn't have a Ph.D. Frankly, I didn't know very much about the Fletcher School. I'd been told by my international affairs advisor at Southern Illinois that it was a great place to go. But it wasn't on my radar scope, because we didn't know about that in East St. Louis.

So I came to Georgetown and took a broad course in international affairs. Spent most of my time studying U.S.-French relations, international organizations, and law.

The U.S.-French-relations approach was interesting in that it really very much influenced my career after that. Not that I went on to work very much in U.S.-French relations, but that I got into the problems of U.S.-French relations, and the problems of the French colonies—Indochina, Algeria, Morocco, and so forth.

Q: This was during the great battle that was taking place in the State Department between the African Bureau (or what passed for it) and the European Bureau. This was a tremendous battle.

MCHENRY: That's right.

So I started out studying U.S.-French relations, and got on the problems that existed between us. And that took me off to looking at colonialism and so forth. And if you were looking at colonialism at the time, you had to be looking at the U.N., which was very much involved in the decolonization process. It's that background, I think, that certainly was influential in where I went from that point on.

Q: Well, then you were here from what, '59 to...

MCHENRY: I taught at Howard from '59 to '62, and I was at Georgetown, also, studying in graduate school. Sixty-two to '63 I took off from Howard, because I had my language

exams and my comprehensive exams here at Georgetown. So I spent a year doing those. Passed them, and I then should have started on my dissertation. But in November of '63, I went to the State Department.

Q: How did that come about?

MCHENRY: It was the Kennedy administration; there were all of these programs trying to get more minorities and women into the State Department. I think I was at some kind of social event when I ran into Ulric Haynes, who later became ambassador to Algeria, and into Cliff Alexander, both of whom were working on the Kennedy NSC (National Security Council) staff. And they then said, “Well, you ought to really look at the State Department.” Of course, I'd been looking at the State Department for years. In fact, I didn't call, I got a call from the Department, and went in to see somebody. I went into the Department as a reserve officer.

I'll never forget the first day, when I went in for an interview, before they started all the security changes. I was interviewed by Joe Sisco, by the way.

Q: Oh, yes. He was the head of IO at that time?

MCHENRY: Joe at the time was the head of U.N. Political Affairs, but he was about to become deputy assistant secretary of state. Harlan Cleveland was the assistant secretary of state at the time, but he wasn't there, for some reason. In any event, there's an argument between Harlan Cleveland and Joe Sisco as to who brought me into the Service. In fact, it was Joe who was there that day.

I went through all the processes. Got held up on the security clearance. I lived in Washington on a street that had only three houses on it; the rest of it was park. There was my house. In the next-door house was a little old lady, very old, and she wouldn't come to the door when the security people came around. And in the next house was a little old lady, very old, who would come to the door, but she'd slam it in their faces. She said to

them that she wouldn't tell them anything. Well, my clearance was being held up and being held up, and I didn't know why. So, finally, Joe Sisco wanted to know why my clearance was being held up. Well, they told Joe what they weren't telling me, that the little old ladies wouldn't talk with them. And, of course, there was nobody else in the neighborhood. So I went to the one that at least would come to the door (the other one was not going to come to the door; she never did), and I said, “Well, it would be helpful if you would talk with these people. You know, just talk to them.”

She said, “Well, they came, and I told them that you all are nice people. I'm not telling them anything more.”

That's all she ever said.

But in any event, I was then assigned to U.N. Political Affairs. By that time, Joe had moved on to deputy assistant secretary.

Q: This was in late '63?

MCHENRY: November '63. I arrived the first part of '63, before Kennedy's assassination. I don't know when I started the process; it was early in '63.

Q: Essentially, you got there, really, and the Johnson administration was taking over.

MCHENRY: Essentially. I got 23 days. Yes, because I arrived before my oldest girl was born. She was born on the 7th, and I was there on the 7th. I think it was either the end of October or the first part of November.

Q: What were your initial responsibilities in the office?

MCHENRY: I was in the office of Dependent-Area Affairs. That was the office that had responsibility for oversight of colonies and the decolonization process. As soon as a country or a territory became independent, then responsibility for it shifted over to the

Bureau of African Affairs. But so long as it wasn't independent, and for the most part we didn't have any representation in many of these countries, our contact was largely through the decolonization process, or, frankly, also through the Bureau of European Affairs.

Q: Portugal...

MCHENRY: So I was there in that office. It had been the office where Ralph Bunche had been. It was the office that handled the Trusteeship Council in that section of the U.N. Charter.

I was assigned to work on two subjects. First, the Trust Territory of the Pacific Islands, for which the United States had responsibility and about which I knew nothing. Secondly, later on, I was put on Southwest Africa, and particularly the International Court of Justice cases for all of Southwest Africa. I did other things as well, but I worked on those for a couple of years.

Q: What were we trying to do? Let's first talk about the Pacific Trust Territories. They've now come into sort of nations.

MCHENRY: Some kind of free association, and some independence...

Q: What was the United States doing about them, and what was, say, the U.N. trying to get us to do about them?

MCHENRY: Well, as far at the United States was concerned, Kennedy had sent Tony Solomon (a Harvard professor who later became assistant secretary for economic affairs, and later became deputy secretary of the treasury) on a special mission to Micronesia, as the Territories were called, to try to restructure U.S. policy. We had been treating the place almost like a...the popular term was “an anthropological zoo,” trying to preserve it in the way it was, without putting in too many resources and things that the area couldn't sustain, and also trying to deny access to the Territories by the Soviet Union.

Q: We were concerned particularly about NATO bases.

MCHENRY: We were concerned about the use of that territory for strategic purposes. We didn't have any active use of it ourselves, but we certainly didn't want anyone else to have any.

In any event, there was a spate of very bad publicity about how the health and the education and the economic development of the place was going down the tubes, and that the United States was responsible for developing the place economically and politically, and that we weren't doing it. So Kennedy sent Solomon out there.

By the time I arrived, Solomon had just come back with his report. And so we were in the midst, for several years, of trying to implement the policy decisions that were implicit in that report, specific or implicit.

I worked on one aspect or another of that question for years, trying to pull the Department of the Interior, which had the administering responsibility for Micronesia, along, and trying to pull the Congress along, and trying to pull the Defense Department along.

Q: I take it the Navy was very much...

MCHENRY: Particularly the Navy, but also the Air Force. To get them to think in different ways. To get them to see that it was possible to develop more in the way of self-government, improve education, improve health and communication and transportation.

It was one of those things where we, the State Department, were responsible for reporting to the U.N. every year on our trusteeship. State had the responsibility for reporting, but had no responsibility for the administration. So we took the heat without really being able to directly affect things on the ground. I worked on the Micronesia issue off and on from late '63, actually, until about 1968.

Q: What was your impression of the people in Interior who were dealing with this?

MCHENRY: Parochial. Some felt that they were doing what the Congress wanted them to do. They were in a habit of doing things a certain way; it was very difficult to get them to change. They felt that they didn't have to listen to the representative of Liberia, which was a backward country telling us how we ought to be carrying out our trusteeship responsibilities. That wasn't true of all of them, but that was the general attitude.

Interior came along, but Interior had on its side the Defense Department, which wasn't going to do anything that was going to lead to a loosening of the relationship between the United States and the Territories. You have to remember, this was the Cold War, and the emphasis was not on kill but on overkill; not on adequacy but on being more than adequate in terms of your defense. That was an issue that took a lot of time.

The other one on Micronesia that took a lot of time was war-claims negotiations. We were engaged in negotiations with the Japanese over the war claims of the Micronesians. We had the responsibility of representing them in trying to persuade the Japanese to pay up. And that was an impossible task. The Japanese all through Southeast Asia tried to avoid taking responsibility for atrocities and misdeeds during the war. We tried to negotiate their payments. We finally got the Japanese around to the point where they would say that they would make an ex gratia payment—We didn't do anything wrong, but out of the generosity of our hearts, here is the payment. That was progress.

But then the Japanese, typical of their war-claims negotiations, wanted to tie it in some way that it was going to help Japan. They wanted access to the islands, sometimes legitimate, sometimes purely commercial. Sometimes they wanted access so they could get the bones of their ancestors and so forth. Sometimes it was just flat-out commercial interest. And they wanted to make their ex gratia payment in goods, whereas the Micronesians wanted yen or greenbacks. We finally got that one resolved. Steve

Swaybold, who was assistant legal advisor in the U.N. Affairs section, was appointed as a special negotiator and finally negotiated a package with the Japanese.

Frankly, Japan got everything it wanted: it was an ex gratia payment; it was goods (that is, in kind); it got them access. Frankly, it got the whole of the Micronesian market, because their in-kind payments were in Toyota trucks or Japanese motor vehicles. I think they would have gotten the market anyway, but that gave them their first hold on that market.

Q: Well, other than being an agent of Japanese commercial interests... Before we turn to Africa, what about Puerto Rico? Did that loom heavily in your...

MCHENRY: Oh, we had Puerto Rico. That was one of responsibilities as well. Guam, the Virgin Islands.

Q: Could you explain what the issue was in the United Nations and how we dealt with it?

MCHENRY: There were a couple of issues. What were our reporting responsibilities for these areas; did we have to report to the United Nations on our oversight of them? And, secondly, what progress were we making towards self-government or independence?

On the first, on the reporting, there was really no problem in reporting. And we did report on Guam and the Virgin Islands. We did not report on Puerto Rico until after Puerto Rico became a commonwealth. We took the position that it was a free association and it was no longer non-self-governing. Some Puerto Ricans liked that; other Puerto Ricans didn't. It is an issue to this day.

Again, Interior was responsible for administering these areas, and we in the State Department were responsible for reporting and defending. Not a very comfortable position. Interior reflecting very strongly held views in the Congress, particularly that of the chairman of the House Interior Committee, a man by the name of Wayne Aspinal, who was there for ages.

Q: Also, weren't there some congressmen who had almost a cozy relationship? They would go out and sit on the beach or something like that?

MCHENRY: Well, every year, they took their little tour to inspect various programs. Guam and the Virgin Islands was a nice thing to do, but Micronesia was not particularly a great tour. The scenery was great, but it was a real hardship.

We had always the question of where we were going with those Territories. And the international community was moving into a period of time when it thought we ought to be going for independence. We argued that our obligation under the charter was self-government, and that the choice, really, of whether they wanted independence was up to the people. In truth, I don't think there was any disposition in the Congress, then or now, to offer independence to Puerto Rico or Guam or the Virgin Islands. Fortunately, there's no great movement in any of them, except perhaps Puerto Rico. Because if there were, we would have a very serious political problem on our hands.

Q: Well, then more and more you got involved in the African thing.

MCHENRY: Yes, because I was responsible for Namibia, and Namibia was in the courts, a big case in the International Court of Justice. It was very hard to do just Namibia. There was no way you could avoid South Africa, Southern Rhodesia, Angola, Mozambique, in part because the strategy of the South Africans and the Portuguese was to hold on to it as a sort of white redoubt. So anyone working on any piece of that inevitably was working on the whole of Africa, from that area.

I was in charge of putting together the policy paper, the contingency paper, for the 1966 judgement of the International Court of Justice on the case brought by Liberia and Ethiopia against South Africa on South Africa's oversight for Namibia. The feeling among the international legal community—a widespread feeling—was that South Africa had finally been boxed in, in terms of all of these cases that had gone to the Court. Most of the cases

had been advisory, so they didn't have to pay any attention to them. But finally we had a contentious case before the Court. And in that circumstance, the judgement of the Court is not advisory but mandatory, and the Security Council is able to enforce the judgment. So the feeling was that this was the key to this problem in the white redoubt.

Q: When you say, 'This was the feeling,' this also reflects the feeling within the State Department?

MCHENRY: Within State, but within the U.N. Among the international legal community, I think it was pretty strongly felt that, in this contentious proceeding, the Court, particularly given all of its advisory opinions in which it had almost uniformly come down against South Africa, would do the same.

Well, I worked on that contingency planning, and I learned one lesson in doing it. I learned many lessons, but I remember one day saying to Charlie Runyon, who was the assistant legal advisor for Africa, “Charlie, we have every contingency in here, except the possibility that South Africa will win, that the Court will come down on South Africa's side.”

And Charlie, who's a marvelous man and one of the most decent, dedicated human beings, in essence said to me, “Young man, don't be silly.”

So we didn't have that contingency.

Well, you know what the Court did. It didn't come down on the South Africans' side. That's what the South Africans would argue that the Court did. But the Court decided not to decide. It said that Liberia and Ethiopia did not have sufficient standing to receive a judgement. This is a principle in law: a court can't make a finding for a group that's not a party to the case. Liberia and Ethiopia had claimed to be parties by virtue of the fact that they were members of the League. And the Court basically said a member of the League can't bring the case. The League, in essence, has to bring the case. Or the case that

could be argued could be brought by missionaries, who had a small role in the old League mandate.

The point is that, after all of that work, all of our planning went out the window. We were surprised. The State Department spokesman said we were surprised. And the South Africans were offput.

From my career point of view, it was, however, an interesting exercise. I got the Superior Service award for my work on that contingency planning.

Q: Nobody mentioned that you didn't have that particular contingency?

MCHENRY: No, we didn't have that contingency in there. I think Charlie would repeat what he said then, but he also acknowledges that that was one of the things that I suggested putting in there.

Q: What was the role of the International Organizations (IO) Bureau during this '63 to '71 period?

MCHENRY: Powerful bureau. Much more than it is today.

Q: Who were some of the powerful? It usually depends on people.

MCHENRY: It depends on people. You had Harlan Cleveland there, who was a thinker, full of ideas. Pretty good relationship with the Kennedy White House. His relationship with Lyndon Johnson broke down very quickly.

Q: What was the problem, as you saw it?

MCHENRY: Oh, it broke down over Article 19 and whether the Soviets were going to have the right to vote when they didn't pay their dues. And there was this crisis at the U.N. Well,

Johnson flew off the handle, and the next thing I knew, Harlan Cleveland was on his way to NATO as U.S. representative to NATO.

But Harlan was superb. He had Joe Sisco, who was the perfect insider. Harlan was a great outsider, great for the Seventh Floor meetings, but Joe Sisco was the great bureaucrat.

Q: I catch this in other interviews.

MCHENRY: Great mover and shaker in the Department, with the ability to maneuver and get things done. When I reported that first day (not when I was interviewed by him earlier, but when I reported), I was called up to the front office (by now he was deputy assistant secretary, and I was no longer going to work directly for him), and Joe said to me, “Now, I don't want you to come into my office ever and tell me that something can't be done. You haven't found the way.” There are people around who will say that they used to go off to other bureaus and they cursed Joe Sisco. But when you look at it, he was absolutely superb. You got in early; you got the cables read. You knew that IO has virtually a blank check in terms of getting into everybody's business. So there's no way of saying IO automatically is out of it. It's one of those functional bureaus that cuts across everybody's lines. And Joe wanted our draft cables, or our action memoranda, or our info. memoranda to be the subject of the clearance. Not somebody else's. We weren't going to react to somebody else's. Ours had to be out there and first and good. He was himself very good and would fight like hell. He was just very good to learn the process from. And that's where I learned it, from Sisco.

Q: How about our various ambassadors to the United Nations at that time?

MCHENRY: When I arrived, lo and behold, the kid from Illinois, Adlai Stevenson, was the ambassador. And very early on, in fact in November of 1963, I was given a special project on some kind of resolution, Swedish or some kind of resolution on South Africa, and I was doing the staff work on it. And it was the first time that I met Adlai Stevenson. Hadn't been in the Department a month. He was different from what I had imagined. Bright,

sparkling eyes, brilliant intellect, but he was short and portly, quite different from what I had imagined. I had always seen him behind a lectern. He was tired. He was harassed, overworked. And that really is the way I saw him, I would say, from that time until he died.

Q: Was there a feeling in the Bureau about Stevenson? I've gotten this from other people, not necessarily from the Bureau, but in other contexts, that here was a man who was terribly brilliant, but he could always see so many sides that it was very difficult to get him to make up his mind and to come down strongly on something. Did you have that feeling or not?

MCHENRY: No, I think he came down strongly. He was a reflective man. He wouldn't bull ahead, like a Joe Sisco. In many ways, he was like Harlan Cleveland. He was a very thoughtful, articulate person, thinking ahead and seeing a very large picture. No, I've seen the charge that he never would come down on any side. The only thing I can say is that, on the issues that I worked with him on, I didn't see that.

Q: He died when?

MCHENRY: He died in '68.

Q: So you had quite a long spell with him.

MCHENRY: It was about three years.

Q: Did you get any feel at all from emanations from other places how the Johnson White House felt about him?

MCHENRY: Oh, in 1963, Stevenson was clearly not in the inner circles, and never was in the inner circles of the Johnson administration. He felt that he didn't get information. He was very disturbed about the Vietnam War. In fact, he wrote a letter, which was published after he died, in which he tried to explain his views on the war. He got caught; I think he

didn't expect how vituperative the attack would be on him when the United States used its planes to take the French and the Belgians into the Congo.

Q: Oh, yes, this was Operation Dragon Rouge.

MCHENRY: Yes. He was sitting there at the Security Council, and he felt very, very uncomfortable. He felt uncomfortable because he wasn't that much involved in the decision. And, secondly, he had a reputation that was very much pro-developing countries and pro-decolonization, and he just saw it all going down the tubes.

Q: But in a way, if you look at this thing, that particular operation probably came out on the plus side, maybe arguably. There was real danger at that time.

MCHENRY: Oh, I think, today, an operation like that would be greeted with a certain amount of relief and cheer by the international community. But that wasn't the case in 1966.

Q: We're trying to capture the spirit.

MCHENRY: In 1963, you had a lot of new countries concerned about their sovereignty and wanting respect for their sovereignty, believing that racism and racial discrimination were extraordinarily strong, and that the world community would do anything to rescue a group of white nuns, but they wouldn't do anything in South Africa. Don't forget, this was right after Sharpeville and all kinds of stuff. So it was a very strong negative reaction, pushed on, of course, by the fact that we were also in the midst of the Cold War, and the Soviets pushed it on very much.

Stevenson was quite different from what I had expected, but he still was and remained and remains a hero of mine.

Q: At that time, how did we view the Soviet Union in United Nations' affairs? Was it a trouble maker?

MCHENRY: Trouble maker. A trouble maker. I think every ambassador who was there, probably from the Korean War through Vernon Walters, which would have been about 1988...

Q: Until the Soviet Union essentially began to collapse.

MCHENRY: Every one of them was engaged in an elaborate chess game. For most of that period, the United States tried to build a strong United Nations, kept its eye on the future, and looked upon the Soviet Union as the one that was the bad guy. But we felt that the U.N. was a positive part of our foreign policy, and we were building international law. And we went out of our way to do things to strengthen the U.N. We wanted to strengthen the secretary-general and the secretariat. The Soviets wanted to weaken the secretariat. We found ways to conduct peacekeeping, even though the Soviets wouldn't pay for it, or opposed it, or restricted the mandate. We found a way of meeting the financial needs of the U.N. We paid our bills, not just on time, but early, because we knew that the U.N. would need that money in order to operate. We helped put together the United Nations Development Agency in New York, for building. And we helped put together a bond loan fund. We did all kinds of things aimed at trying to make sure that the organization stayed reasonably strong.

I think, frankly, after I left, all of that changed. It started to change with Moynihan. We got back on track with Scranton. And we just got off the rails when Jeane Kirkpatrick arrived. Then we started doing some of the same things the Soviets were doing. We wanted a weak secretariat. We started withholding funds. We started vetoing indiscriminately. And we didn't get back on the tracks until, frankly, the Soviets took the initiative to straighten things up.

Q: Well, again, talking about this '63 to '71 period, did the problem of Israel and the Palestinians cause much trouble, from your perspective?

MCHENRY: Oh, it was a major problem. In the period '63 to '67, it was a problem handled quite differently from the way it was handled after the '67 War. Now, '63 to '67, I think the United States was more even handed. We tended to judge developments on their merits. There was some influence of domestic politics, but less. After '67, we moved into a period where we were still somewhat even handed. And that lasted, I think, through the early part of the Nixon administration, probably towards the end of the Rogers Plan, in '71. But after then, I think the United States became, frankly, partisan on the issue. And I say partisan not in the sense that we wanted Israel to remain strong and wanted its security to be protected, but partisan in the sense that we either didn't recognize or would rationalize or would overlook some of the problems created in the area by Israel. And we became seen by the Arabs as just hopelessly one sided in our approach.

Now others would disagree with this assessment, I know.

But we got ourselves into a situation, for example, where, to pass a resolution, it had to be balanced. You had to point to some dastardly act that the Israelis had done, and a dastardly act that the Arabs had done. And each resolution had this in it, so the resolutions were meaningless, as opposed to a situation in which you judged each of those acts on their merits, and you didn't have to balance it. If the Israelis were the ones who were the bad boys this time, come down on their heads like a ton of bricks. And if the Arabs were the ones who were the bad boys on the other side, come down on their heads like a ton of bricks. That doesn't say that you didn't keep in perspective the guilt of both parties. But we got into this balanced-resolution business, which was a Kissinger invention, and I think it's just been a disaster from that point on.

We moved, by the way, from a circumstance where the United States sometimes voted “with” Israel, sometimes voted “against” Israel, to a point where we abstained on

everything, to the point where Israel expected us to vote no, to veto. I mean, that's the progression of policy. And the presumption was, until, I would say, the last couple of years, that the United States was going to veto... issue.

Q: Did you, dealing with Africa, and colonial South Africa particularly, keep having Israel thrown in your face? Because, in many ways, it was, arguably, a certain reflection of the way Israel was treating its Palestinians and all that. Was this a problem at that time?

MCHENRY: Not really. Not really. You have to remember that, until '67, Israel had a very strong pro-Africa policy. They had very good relations with most of the African countries. They had lots of agricultural-development programs, technical-assistance programs. And there was a certain admiration among the Africans for what Israel had done in its own country in terms of the kibbutzim and the self-help...

Q: In dealing with Arab conditions.

MCHENRY: Oh, yes, there was this very close relationship. And it broke down in '67. It broke down in part because African countries, newly independent, saw Israel resorting to the use of force to solve a problem. They saw Israel make the first strike in terms of the '67 War. You can rationalize that they had to, but I'm just trying to put it as they saw it. And they saw Israel, which had exercised a right of self-determination, preventing others from exercising a right of self-determination, and occupying territories. And so the relationship started breaking down.

The relationship wasn't helped, of course, by the fact that the Arabs started exploiting and pointing problems with Israel's policy, particularly on South Africa. They'd talk about the relationship between Israel and South Africa.

Years later, during some of the oil shortages, the Arabs would imply (though I don't think they ever really did it) that they were going to place an embargo on petroleum shipments to South Africa, or that they were going to give the African countries better terms on

petroleum if they would only cooperate in helping us with Israel. It never occurred, and the Africans should never have expected it, but some of them did.

I think there were times, later on, on some issues, where the Israeli-African question came together. Clearly, Mobutu's recognition of Israel was not because Mobutu saw anything...

Q: Mobutu was the chief of state, still is, kind of, of Zaire.

MCHENRY: Right. But he saw the possibility of getting support for additional aid from some communities of the United States if he were seen as pro-Israel. He did the same thing on Communism—if he were seen as anti-Communism, he felt he'd get some more aid. That's been the way he's operated for many years.

So I think the Israeli issue became more and more complicated, more and more emotional.

As I look back, I would say that much of the early history of the United Nations, particularly the United Nations of the '60s, '70s, and '80s, was dominated by three issues. One was the Arab-Israeli question. The second one was the racial question in Southern Africa, whether it was South Africa or Rhodesia or Portuguese... The third was north-south economic questions. And those tended to consume the place. They came up in almost every guise you can imagine. If you were discussing world health and WHO, someone found a way to bring up the Israeli question or the South African question. If you were talking about anthropological digs, the Arabs would find some way in UNESCO to talk about what the Israelis were doing on the West Bank. There was no place that you could avoid these issues. In the whole of the U.N.'s history, no matter how technical the meeting, they found a way.

Q: What about the Vietnam thing? You were at the U.N. from '63 to '71, which is when Vietnam was certainly on the front of our plate. Was our U.N. representation much involved with that issue?

MCHENRY: It was, and it was a source of considerable friction between Johnson and U Thant, who was at that time secretary-general. U Thant tried, on a number of occasions, to do something on Vietnam...sort of solve that... Both because he was secretary-general and because he was from the area...

Q: Burma.

MCHENRY: He tried, on a number of occasions, to speak out and to make it clear that he was neutral, objective, that he wasn't carrying out the bidding of the United States. Well, of course, Johnson didn't think that there was anything neutral about Vietnam—you were either with us or you weren't. And their relations got pretty bitter.

I wasn't directly on Vietnam; it was in the office of U.N. Political Affairs. I do remember, however, that day when the Gulf of Tonkin incident took place. Patty Byrne, who went on to hold a number of ambassadorial posts...

Q: Patricia Byrne. Burma was one of the places, I know.

MCHENRY: Patty was bouncing down the hall ('bouncing' is appropriate, because, as you know, she had a hip injury, and one leg was longer than the other), and she was very excited and saying, “They did it, they attacked us!”

Q: The North Vietnamese supposedly (it's still controversial) had launched a torpedo attack at some of our fleet.

MCHENRY: Yes. Patty was absolutely convinced that it had occurred. Now we know, in hindsight, that it's not such a clear cut thing.

But there were a number of efforts on the part of U Thant to be helpful on Vietnam. None of them really got anywhere, and the U.N. ultimately played little or no role in the resolution of Vietnam.

Q: What was your position? Were you still a reserve Foreign Service officer? Was this considered a political appointment, or was this a regular appointment?

MCHENRY: No, it wasn't political. At the time, we had the reserve officer status, and theoretically it was one of those, to fill those categories that the Department was short of. It could be positions, it could be communicators... people, but it could also be as... an entry-level place for people who were brought in from other agencies, with government experience, or, in my case, no experience.

I stayed there until 1968. In truth, I was there on the job until 1966, I guess. In 1966, I became officer-in-charge of that section. It was a dwindling section anyway, because it would spin these countries off as fast as... But I became officer-in-charge, and Sisco and Rusk started sending me out on special assignments. I went to the U.N. General Assembly and was on the delegation in 1966. This was after my Superior Honor... I went off to Lima, Peru, as the advisor for the congressional delegation... In 1968, I was scheduled to go off on a U.N. mission to Papua, New Guinea, only to be called in at the very last minute and told I wasn't going. Actually, I'd looked forward to going, but the secretary had other ideas. There was a very complicated game of musical chairs going on, which ended up as follows: Harriman, who was scheduled to go off to head the delegation...

Q: Was he assistant secretary, or was he special ambassador then, or was he head of East Asian Affairs?

MCHENRY: No, he had left there. Was he under secretary for Political Affairs by then? I don't know what he was in '68.

Q: But, anyway, he was a powerhouse.

MCHENRY: He was a powerhouse. Ambassador at Large.

Q: Wherever he was, he was in charge, more or less.

MCHENRY: He was scheduled to go off to Tehran, to head the U.S. delegation to a U.N. conference on human rights (in Tehran of all places), when they finally got their act together about the Vietnam negotiations in Paris. And Johnson pulled Harriman off the Iran delegation and sent him to Paris. They pulled me off the U.N. delegation going to Papua, New Guinea, and sent me off to Iran with Roy Wilkins, who took Harriman's place in Iran.

Well, I started doing things like that, and my little shop in the State Department sort of... I was gone for much for those two years, '66 to '68. In '68, in November, right after the election when Nixon was elected, I was sitting in my little office, and the phone rang, and it was William Rogers, whom Johnson had appointed in '67 or so as the U.S. representative on the Special Commission on Southwest Africa, and I had been sent off to be his advisor. In any event, in November of '68, the phone rang, and it was Rogers on the phone, saying that Nixon was going to appoint him secretary of state. Rogers didn't know that many people in the State Department, but he knew me and wanted me to work with him and Dick Pedersen, who later became the ambassador to Hungary, on the transition from Johnson to Nixon. And so I worked on the transition team. I was detailed to the Nixon transition team, of all places, November, December, and January, '68-69.

Q: You're one of the professionals, you're there, you know what's happening, but then there are always, in any administration, including what's going on now, these very eager sharks who are ready to take over the new administration. What was your impression of the crew who were getting ready to come in during this change not just of people, but also from Democratic to Republican?

MCHENRY: Well, it was a gentler transition than I later saw. It was still a period of an element of bipartisanship in foreign policy. Some of the people were brought back in, like Alex Johnson, a career officer who was simply brought back in a higher position in the new administration. Dick Pedersen, who had been up at the U.N., was brought in. Elliot Richardson, who was an Eastern Republican stylistic figure, came down as under secretary of state, the number-two position. I don't think that there was as much ideology

in that transition as we saw, for example, from Carter to Reagan. I say that despite the fact that Nixon made any number of speeches in which he talked about the State Department and that he knew who the good guys were and the bad ones, and that he was going to clean up the place and so forth. There wasn't that much of that at the time. And, of course, Rogers was really a gentle and decent person, and Richardson was.

What we saw, however, early on, was not the sharks taking over so much as the complete takeover of foreign policy by the White House, specifically by Kissinger and the NSC staff. And we know that's what Nixon wanted to do.

Q: How did this reflect on what you were doing?

MCHENRY: Well, in the transition period, I saw it occurring. I saw those drafts of Nixon's first NSA..., National Security... And it was very clear to me that they were setting up a structure in which the secretary of state was going to be frozen out. In fact, I told Secretary Rogers, and he expressed the view that it didn't matter what the bureaucratic structure was, he was going to be secretary of state, and when he wanted to get to the president, he would.

Q: He was a good friend of Nixon's. He thought he was.

MCHENRY: At least he thought he was. Rogers, of course, had helped Nixon out in his campaign, and in the earlier stage when Nixon had gotten into some trouble, it had been Rogers who'd been there to help him out. I think Nixon totally, completely not only mistreated him, but humiliated him. It wasn't just Nixon, it was also Kissinger. Kissinger would say he was doing what the president wanted, but he didn't have to act in the way that he did. And I think Kissinger wanted to be secretary of state, anyway.

Q: What were you doing after the transition?

MCHENRY: I worked in the transition until January 20, and then for about three months after that I stayed in the secretary's office as a special assistant. And we finally got the joint reasonably organized.

I then went to the counselor's office as a special assistant, and handled the staffing of the State Department's responses to the NSC's memoranda. I attended, every week, the NSC weekly group, which Kissinger chaired, in the White House, in a staff position. Sometimes on subjects where I had acknowledged expertise, and it was more than a staff position and I was very much involved in discussions, in the Situation Room. But usually we were doing things like review of Vietnam policy, review of Cambodia policy, review of the chemical weapons nonproliferation treaty, reviewing the nuclear-capability weapons locations, that kind of stuff.

Q: What was your impression of how Kissinger operated at this particular time, and how he handled these meetings?

MCHENRY: They were Henry's seminars. He was very good at getting to the issues that he wanted discussed. No matter what the paper said, he was very good at getting to the issue that he wanted discussed and orienting the policy towards the policy that he wanted to put forward.

And he had a leg up on the secretary of state. The secretary of state was out traveling, receiving visitors, paying courtesy calls, doing perfunctory things. He didn't get involved in the policy review until it got to the NSC or it got to a memorandum going over to the NSC. Whereas Kissinger was involved from the very beginning.

Q: I've heard it said that part of Kissinger's method when he got there was that he got the State Department tied up.

MCHENRY: He tied it up with paperwork. Absolutely tied it up with paperwork. Well, NSSM-1 (National Security Study Memorandum, One), which I think was a complete

review of Vietnam policy, with I don't know how many questions being raised, was enough to tie the Department up for three or four months. There was no way a secretary was going to get involved in that kind of thing. The Department was tied up, and Kissinger's people were working on the real policy.

Q: Did you see a twinkle in his eye when he was passing these requests on to you all?

MCHENRY: No, I didn't see a twinkle in his eye, but I knew some of the people who were on his staff. You have to remember that Kissinger had a lot of people on his staff who were State Department people.

Q: Larry Eagleburger.

MCHENRY: Larry Eagleburger, Roger Morris, Tony Lake, Dick Moose. You knew some of these people.

Q: Were they letting you know what was happening?

MCHENRY: No, not directly, but you knew them well enough that you knew what was going on. You knew what was going on.

Q: To get a little of the technicalities of this thing, Kissinger was asking for memoranda, but after all, he was acting as the president's man. Is that the way it worked?

MCHENRY: Well, there were two sets of memoranda that would come out: one was the national security study memorandum, and the other was the national security action memorandum.

The study memoranda would always come out under Kissinger's signature — “The President wishes a study done on..., and the following aspects are to be discussed..., and the responsibility for carrying out this study belongs to...” — and he would have signed it.

Whether the president ever expressed a wish for a study on..., you didn't know. It said, “The President,” signed “Henry Kissinger.”

The second memorandum, the national security decision memorandum, or action memorandum (each administration changes the name, but they are the same), was: “The President has decided...” Those were sometimes signed by Nixon; more and more, it seemed to me, they were signed by Kissinger. But they said, “The President has decided,” so presumably Kissinger didn't send those out on his own. Those were the policies decisions that he had taken on whatever the issue was, and the bureaucracy was expected to implement it.

Q: Did you find within the State Department, particularly with Rogers, that there was any particular disagreement with these things? Were things taking a course that was different than maybe it would have been if the State Department had gotten more involved?

MCHENRY: Oh, I think State thought it didn't have sufficient influence, and that the options were rigged in some instances. That usually on a policy situation, if you say there are five options, there really are only two options, and you're choosing among the shade, and don't spend your time on the other stuff that's there.

Q: And nuclear war, surrender or what we want you to do. This type of thing.

MCHENRY: That kind of thing. And it was also clear that, as we went along, there was more and more of an effort to restrict information. In fact, the NSC review group, which I attended, started meeting less and less. The under secretaries' review group, which was chaired by Elliot Richardson and which Kissinger was to attend at the State Department, to my knowledge, only met twice, with Kissinger present. That is, when he came over to the State Department. As things went along, they started organizing more and more policy groups, with tighter and tighter restrictions on who participated. So, you could be looking at one aspect of policy and not know what the hell was happening in another aspect of policy,

because you weren't in that group. It was a way of controlling information. It was a way of cutting down debate. It was a way of preventing leaks.

Q: Was Rogers concerned about this, or was he so busy being secretary of state that he didn't really either comprehend or worry about the essential loss of power?

MCHENRY: I don't know the answer to that question.

I know that any secretary of state, inevitably, is busy doing the things that go along with being secretary of state, and the amount of time that you have is relatively restricted. You know that, the first part of December, you've got to be in Brussels for NATO meetings, you know you've got to be in ASEAN meetings.

Q: ASEAN countries being the...

MCHENRY: The association of Southeast Asian states—Thailand, the Philippines, Singapore, Malaysia, and so forth. There are rigidities built in to it. And you've got 160 ambassadors here, all of whom want a chance to see you, want to entertain you, that kind of thing. You've got all the time that's spent on the Hill, none of which a national security advisor has to do, or they can be very much more selective in what they do.

I'm sure Rogers must have been concerned not only about policy, but about some indignities that he suffered. And he was not, at least to me, or to Pedersen, or, so far as I know, to Richardson, he didn't say it...

There were some times when he got into a policy battle and he won. Nixon and Kissinger get a great deal of credit for their China opening. But it is a fact that, early on, I think it was no more than four weeks into the administration, we had a problem with the Chinese that resulted in their refusing to hold a regular meeting in...was it Romania?

Q: Well, it was Warsaw and then Prague. I think it was Warsaw most of the time.

MCHENRY: The White House, if it had had its way, would have called them all a bunch of sons-of-bitches. But Rogers insisted on putting out a very conciliatory statement that said we're ready to meet whenever you are, and so forth. I mean, just trying to keep the blasted door open.

It is also a fact that the first reaction, surely, of Nixon, and I don't know where Kissinger stood, when the EC-121, -131...what was that plane that was shot down over Korea?

Q: It was one of our electronic monitoring planes.

MCHENRY: Surveillance-type. The reaction of Nixon was as belligerent as could be. But Rogers was one of those who was urging caution: We don't have all the facts here, in the first place. We don't act without the facts. And, secondly, if you take some kind of retaliatory action, what's right behind it?

I think that characterizes his attitudes as we went along.

As the first part of the administration went on, those first three months, I started drifting out of his direct office, where I was there and in the discussions first thing in the morning. But if he ever expressed anything other than turn-the-other-cheek, I don't know about it. He hasn't said a word in all these years.

Q: No.

MCHENRY: He hasn't written anything in all of these years, even though tons of material are out now expressing Nixon's and Kissinger's attitudes towards him.

The one time that I heard Rogers express his views was not on foreign policy. He came back from the White House one day, and he said that the White House wanted him to go to the Hill to help out on Carswell and Hainesworth.

Q: These were two Supreme Court nominations, both of which got turned down.

MCHENRY: Both of which got turned down. The first one was Carswell, and of course, Carswell lost, and then Hainesworth. And Rogers said there was no way that he was going to do that. He said, “They got themselves into it. Let them get themselves out.”

Q: What was your impression of these young officers, Larry Eagleburger, Dick Moose, Tony Lake and all? These were all members of the Foreign Service or State Department, but they were brought over into the very heady atmosphere where, as relatively young people, they were kind of free wheeling. Did you have the feeling that they kind of had the ear of Kissinger and were running things? Were they active, or were they kind of having fun?

MCHENRY: They were all what I call special assistants. That is, part of their early start was that they were a special assistant to somebody. That's where they got their visibility; that's where they got their bureaucratic knowledge. And I got some of mine, later on, that same way. They were bright, energetic. I'm not sure how strongly committed to a particular policy, and I don't know how rooted they were.

Q: Probably more pragmatic than...

MCHENRY: Much more pragmatic, though I'm not sure pragmatic is the term I want to use. It turned out, later on, that they were far more principled than one might have thought at the time. That there was a point where they drew the line and they didn't want to be associated with the policies. And that's why you saw Lake and Moose and Morris and a couple of others leave. But they were bright, and Kissinger knew that. And they would see to it that an issue was done the way he wanted it done. And if the bureaucracy wasn't able to do it, they could themselves. They had a certain substantive grounding, and they knew the system. Mort Halperin was there as well.

Q: How did your time in this administration play out?

MCHENRY: I stayed there as special assistant to the counselor, who was the closest person to the secretary, I think, even closer than Elliot Richardson. We did all of his speeches. I headed up that staff, and at one time, I had three or four people there, pretty good people. Warren Zimmermann, who later became ambassador to Yugoslavia.

Q: Warren and I served in Yugoslavia together.

MCHENRY: Well, Warren was one of those brought in to write speeches. It was a pretty bright bunch of people.

I stayed there until 1971. Frankly, I got concerned about two things. I didn't like what was going on in the war.

Q: The Vietnam War.

MCHENRY: Yes, I just didn't like what was going on. Secondly, bureaucratic politics in the White House were playing out. We were less and less playing the role that I thought we ought to and that made the job interesting.

And I guess there was a third thing, which didn't occur until later. I was relatively young. I wanted to move on from an assistant role to some kind of position of my own. And I felt if I went out, I could avoid the war. There was an election coming on; Nixon might lose. I would be a little older. So I went off on leave. I went to Brookings for two years, with the Council on Foreign Relations.

When I started thinking about coming back, I ran into a problem. And that is that I really got off in a deputy assistant's job. And the system turned me down. I was too young.

Q: How old were you at the time?

MCHENRY: That was 1973, so I was 36. We now have very young people in those positions.

Q: Yes, I know we do.

MCHENRY: But we didn't then.

Q: We didn't then. No, we didn't.

MCHENRY: We didn't then. I became ambassador to the U.N. when I was 43, which was unheard of.

But I was 36 going on 37 years of age, and David Newsom wanted me to come in as one of his deputies. The system wouldn't hear of it, and I said, “Oh, the hell with that. I'm outside, I'll stay out.” So I resigned in 1973.

Q: Why don't we pick up the next time with how you got involved with the Carter group and coming back.

MCHENRY: Okay.

Q: Today is April 12, 1993, continuing the interview. We really stopped last time, covering your public career, when you had left the Department of State in 1971.

MCHENRY: Well, technically, I was still there until 1973. I really went off on leave without pay.

Q: Could you cover just a little of what you were doing in the betwixt and between times, until you came back in 1977?

MCHENRY: I left and took a fellowship with the Council on Foreign Relations and a guest-scholar position at the Brookings Institution.

[Note: At this point, there is a significant break in the tape covering the 1977-1979 period. The omitted material concerns Namibia and South Africa. The missing segment will be included in a subsequent version.]

[Soviet ambassador to the UN Oleg Troyanovsky] could be more charming and Western and so forth. He was the son of a Soviet diplomat, had grown up in Washington, D.C., attended Sidwell Friends School, and gone on to Swarthmore.

Q: A good Quaker.

MCHENRY: That was Troyanovsky. We had reasonable working relations with Troyanovsky in this period of time.

We were playing an elaborate chess game. We sought to sever the seemingly automatic link between the Soviets and the Third World. We became, ourselves, more active. We put proposals on the table rather than simply reacting to proposals. By building a relationship with the Third World, we frequently were able to isolate the Soviet Union. In fact, that was part of the strategy. We hoped to develop proposals and approaches that would be seen by Third World countries as in their own interest.

In a number of instances, the Soviets would give a speech in the Security Council, and they'd say, we think this is a bad idea, almost dumb. And if you Third World countries are stupid enough to go along with it, too bad. But we won't block it.

We learned that the Soviets would be reluctant to block something that those countries perceived to be in their own interest, so long as there was no clear attack on a Soviet interest. And that pretty well worked. We had reasonably good relations with the Soviet Union during this period of time.

Now it broke down.

Q: Was this December of '79?

MCHENRY: It broke down particularly with the Afghanistan invasion.

I remember Troyanovsky came to the Security Council and asked, What's going on here? We had to go into Afghanistan. But we, the United States and the Soviet Union, have all of these interests in common on SALT and...

Q: That's the Strategic Arms Limitation Talks.

MCHENRY: We shouldn't throw out the baby with the bath water, he lamented.

But, of course, it was a very important point. And even if you accepted Troyanovsky's view that the Soviet interest led to their going into Afghanistan, they had placed in jeopardy the ability of the administration to get through things like SALT. How could you rely upon an agreement with a country that would simply use its might to crush...

Q: This was the first time the Soviet Army had gone into an area that had not been occupied by it after World War II. It was a very dramatic break from the past.

MCHENRY: It was a major, major move.

I have my own theories on why they did it. And I suppose that, now that we're getting more information out of the Soviet Union after its collapse, we'll get more information. It already appears that this was not a decision that was widely debated among Soviet officialdom. A group of tired old men took the decision.

Q: Using “tired” in the British sense.

MCHENRY: Using tired in the British sense. Well, and in the American sense, too. Both this time.

They saw that one of the countries that they were just bringing into the Socialist fold was in danger of leaving, and in this instance, by the heavy-handed movement of a pro-Soviet individual.

I think they were also concerned about the spread of Islamic fundamentalism, that it would spread from Afghanistan across that whole underbelly of the Soviet Union and cause them untold problems.

Whatever their reasons, it was a mistake. It got them bogged down, as we had been bogged down in Vietnam. It destroyed the momentum on arms limitations. It didn't destroy the treaty. Despite the fact that Reagan refused to sign it, he observed its terms. He made a lot of refusing to sign it or to get it ratified, but he observed its terms.

Q: Well, back to the initial thing you were talking about with the Soviets, did you in the U.S.U.N., our mission there, sit down and say, "Why don't we sponsor this? This'll stick it to the Soviets and they won't..."

MCHENRY: No, no, no. No, no, we didn't approach it as: Stick it to the Soviets. We always approached it as: What do we need to resolve this problem? Once we concluded what we needed to resolve whatever problem it was, then we asked ourselves: How are we going to implement it? Our first effort, after trying to work with our allies, was to then work with the Third World counties, and to try to persuade them of the wisdom of whatever approach we were taking.

Sometimes we would keep the Soviets informed, so that they couldn't act wildly out of ignorance or pique. Sometimes we didn't inform them at all, if we felt that it wasn't appropriate to do so at that time. On the Namibia question, which is a perfect example, we always kept the Soviets fully informed of what was going on. We wanted them to hear, from us, what was going on, as opposed to their hearing third-hand a story that might not be true. And I think that strategy worked, because it put them in the position of having to

come out against something that some of their close associates wanted. They didn't want to do that.

Q: Talking about deciding how to form things and what should be done, I have the impression that, within the United Nations, at least from the American perspective, we represented probably the one power that kept looking around for things to fix. That we were much more the instigator of things. Or is this a false impression?

MCHENRY: Well, we weren't looking around for things to fix. The fact is that, if you are a power, a leader, you can't avoid involvement. And since you are involved, do you react or are you pro-active? We took the position that we should not simply sit there and react; in many instances, find ourselves having to oppose something because we didn't like it or it was against our interests. Why not take the initiative? And that's what we tried to do.

Now in some instances, it succeeded; in others, it didn't. We were paralyzed on the Middle East after a while, because the Middle East had become an issue of domestic American politics. At some place along the way, we reached the point where we found ourselves opposing in the United Nations what had been stated as American policy by the spokesman of the State Department. And when you get in that kind of circumstance, it's very difficult to handle a question. So the Middle East was one of those issues where frankly we couldn't do very much, even though Carter and Vance were working wonders at Camp David.

Q: Was this the time when they came up with the U.N. resolution saying that Zionism is racism?

MCHENRY: No, no, that had been an earlier period. That goes back to Moynihan. My own view, supported by some pretty close observers of the U.N., was that the demeanor and manner of the American representative at the time, Moynihan, played a large role in the passing of that pretty ridiculous resolution.

Q: He was quite arrogant, wasn't he? Really sort of intellectually arrogant. I'm not sure if that would be the way to describe it, but he was...

MCHENRY: He was arrogant.

Q: He was having fun sticking knives into...

MCHENRY: Yes, and he thought it was intellectual. But I'm not sure one can be intellectually arrogant.

Q: Yes, all right. But you did have this feeling that he seemed to hold the United Nations in disdain, in a way.

MCHENRY: Well, partially in disdain, but partially it was because he felt that we had a more noble and higher and more compelling ideology, and the others were slow in getting the point. I don't know whether you could call that disdain, or whether there was an impatience in wanting to see the U.N. act in our image.

In any event, that kind of loud-mouthed name-calling (and in this instance with adjectives and adverbs, as opposed to four-letter words) doesn't really get you very far in problem-solving. But it was used.

Q: When you were there, relations were not adversarial in the U.S.U.N. delegation, with Andrew Young and all sort of reaching out.

MCHENRY: Well, we had differences of view, particularly with some of the Third World countries, particularly on north-south questions. But we had an audience. We weren't looked upon as the enemy. We were looked upon as people who didn't quite understand, didn't get it right, but who meant well. And that's a big difference.

Q: Oh, I'm sure it is. Now one of the things that you mentioned and rolled your eyes up at was the problem of Cyprus.

MCHENRY: Oh, Cyprus is one of those impossible questions to handle, very much like the Middle East. You sit down and you talk with the various parties, and each one of them wants to give you a hundred years of history, from their point of view (or, if it's the Middle East, thousands of years of history). I took the position with the Cypriots and the Turks and the Greeks (the same one I took with the Arabs and the Israelis): “I can't do a thing about the past, and neither can you. We can't even do anything about the present. We can hope to influence the future, so let's get to work on that.” But the interminable meetings in the Security Council, I think every six months, on the renewal of the U.N. mandate for Cyprus would just drive you up the wall.

Q: Did Cuba get in there at all? Were our relations with Cuba a problem?

MCHENRY: We had sort of the same kind of relations with Cuba that we had with the Soviet Union. It was a period of some warming of relations with Cuba, or at least the development of contacts. You remember, we established an interest office there. We had a number of contacts with them in New York. We had a number of contacts with them in New York in part because of terrorist-type actions against the Cubans in New York. It was a period in which there wasn't a friendly relationship with the Cubans, but it was correct and we got business done.

Q: Well, Carter was trying to open up somewhat.

MCHENRY: We were trying to open up some.

Q: I was doing a little research in this, and I noticed that at one point one of our representatives, Brady Tyson, apologized for our role in a Chilean coup that had taken

place earlier, in which we'd never said that we'd had a role. Could you explain a little about this, give a little feeling about our delegation, who he was and that sort of thing.

MCHENRY: Brady Tyson was one of those people with a long association with Andy, growing, I think, out of the civil rights movement in the South. An extremely liberal person, critical of the United States' actions in Vietnam and Chile, any number of other places, later Nicaragua. He took his criticisms, I think, a little further. With him it was a passion, frequently not intellectually based. In any event, he was an example of one of those who came into government and had no idea about the discipline required. There was no reason for Brady Tyson to be saying anything about Chile. I think he made the statement at a meeting of the Human Rights Commission in Geneva, certainly without instructions. Needless to say, it immediately got all kinds of attention. He was a kind of person who was, as I say, close to Andy, associated with him, and frankly should not have been there.

Q: This, of course, is not unique to any one administration. Since our United Nations representatives are usually private citizens, serving for only a short period, those of you who are on the regular staff must spend a certain amount of time cleaning up after these loose cannons.

MCHENRY: It can be very, very critical. It's difficult not just when someone like Brady Tyson is brought in, but every year, when we have congressional representatives on the delegation, we have the same problem. They chafe at the idea of taking a position and speaking for The United States Government. They are accustomed to saying whatever they wish, and are proud of their independence. The practice of having representatives on the delegation has constantly led to tensions.

Q: Do you train the rest of the U.N. to understand our system?

MCHENRY: Well, we hope that people understand us. But it creates problems. Q: I notice that you had a problem with a ballet star, Ludmilla Lakova. You got involved in that.

MCHENRY: She was a Bolshoi ballerina, who was placed in a very difficult position when her husband decided to defect during one of the Bolshoi's tours of the United States. He defected, with or without her knowledge, I don't know. In any event, the Soviets then tried to hustle her out of the United States, quickly. We intervened in order to assure ourselves that she was departing voluntarily, that she knew she had the choice of staying or going. Unfortunately, events moved so swiftly that, when we intervened, she was already on a Soviet airliner at JFK Airport, an airliner poised to take off. We prevented the plane from taking off, and for something like 72 hours, we held that plane while we negotiated with the Soviets on her right to choose.

I got into this by some fluke. I was at the Waldorf with Andy, at a meeting with the then-minister of foreign affairs of Egypt, now the secretary-general, Boutros-Ghali, when the State Department called and said, “There is a problem out at Kennedy Airport. We have a couple of guys on their way up there, but they may not get there in time. We need somebody to go to Kennedy to oversee this problem.” So I took off to the airport. I arrived at JFK, and I told my driver, “I'll be back in a few minutes.” I was there, as I say, for more than 72 hours, negotiating with a Soviet U.N. representative who was also dispatched to the airport to oversee this little problem that they had.

We insisted that she could not really exercise her right of choice so long as she was on that airplane. The Soviets refused to allow her to come off, and suggested we could ask her any questions we wanted to ask her while she was on the plane. So, while, unfortunately, a planeload of people sat there for 72 hours, we negotiated with the Soviets to have her come off.

Finally, we proposed to the Soviets that we would back up to the plane one of those Dulles-Airport-type passenger vans, and that she would physically leave the airplane, go into the passenger van, see a lawyer, have the presence of interpreters and others there,

and speak with me and my State Department colleagues about her right to stay if she wished.

She came out of the plane into the van and was told that she should either go back on the plane or she could go down the steps to freedom, if she wished. She chose to go back on the plane.

There was a peculiar reaction of some of the American public. The more thoughtful ones applauded the determination to ensure that she had a choice. The ideologues among the American public, people who had been applauding our holding the plane until she had the right to choose, then criticized us for accepting her choice. Their view was: “How could anyone in their right mind choose to go back to the Soviet Union? Why were we so stupid as to not recognize that there was something wrong if she chose to go back to the Soviet Union?”

Well, she did choose to go back to the Soviet Union, in unmistakable terms, and in an atmosphere that was as free as we could get it.

I think she chose to go back for a variety of reasons. First, she was past her prime. Her husband could look forward to starting over in the United States, but she couldn't. She wouldn't be as important in American ballet as she was in the Soviet ballet. Second, she struck me as a mama's child, anxious to get back to mama. Third (and this is probably hindsight), her husband was a wanderer anyway. So she went.

It was an interesting experience for me. The foreign-policy community knew who I was, what I had done, and what I was capable of doing, but the public, by and large, didn't know. Suddenly, for 72 hours, I was constantly on television, and got a great deal of attention for the manner in which I handled it.

There were some funny things that occurred during that time.

Q: For example?

MCHENRY: Well, I remember taking off to go to the men's room. The press, of course, which had been following me all over the place, just took off right behind me, until we got to the door, and the women stopped. Well, that was 1977. Today, I don't think the women would have stopped; I think they would keep going.

Secondly, I remember, at some point, I was exhausted and needed a nap, and the Pan American Airlines people cleared out a lounge for me to get some sleep. I went in this lounge and I spread out on one of these couches. But after fifteen minutes or so, I was awakened. Someone else was in the lounge.

It turned out that there was, on the other side of this couch (I, knowing she was present, but she, not knowing I was present), a young reporter, who had screwed off the end of the telephone, hooked up her mike to talk right directly into the phone, and was broadcasting live on the radio. She was saying, to her attentive audience, that something was going on; McHenry had disappeared; there must be intense negotiations behind the scenes.

There I was, right there, trying to get some sleep.

Q: Well, did you get any reaction after this was over to the fact that you didn't persuade the ballerina to stay in the United States?

MCHENRY: No, I think, as I say, most of the press, the civil libertarians, accepted that we had done what we were obligated to do: to give her a choice. But the ideologues didn't accept that. And they wrote some harsh letters here and there, and made some harsh statements here and there.

Q: Well, why don't we stop at this point, and then we can pick up again. If you don't mind, I'm moving in a deliberate way, but I think it's far more important to take my time.

This is a continuing interview with Ambassador McHenry. Today is the 16th of September, '93. Back at the time when you were understudying Andrew Young, he toured Africa in May of '77 and called for a boycott of South Africa, which caused quite a bit of controversy at the time. What were the impressions he came back with after that trip?

MCHENRY: Is that the first trip that he took after he was appointed in early '77?

Q: It probably was.

MCHENRY: He went to Tanzania for some kind of meeting. I don't know, I think you have to remember that Andy was just starting out. The press was focusing on him. He had not yet crossed the line between being an independent congressman and an American diplomat.

I think there was a value in Andy's going to that conference, which, as I remember, was in Tanzania. A collateral event was the uniting of the parties in Zanzibar and Tanzania. The value of Andy's going was the same value you got in much of his travel in the Third World: it spotlighted, gave attention to Africa and/or developing countries. Sometimes, when it is not a policy priority and you are short on programs, a spotlight becomes a substitute. But I think that was, to some extent, valuable. It caught the attention of the public, made people look at the problems more.

I don't think that we ever knew where Andy came down on the question of sanctions. It is true that he spoke of sanctions in Tanzania. But on that same trip, he went on to South Africa. And many South Africans would say that he came over as a very conservative individual. He spoke very highly, for example, of the role of business, that you need to work with businesses. In essence, he was talking with the same people who would have been the victims or the object of sanctions. I to this day don't know what his views were on sanctions; that is, what his considered views were on it.

Q: You were part of the professional ranks of our mission in New York at the United Nations. This is when sanctions were one of the ways of dealing. What was the considered view? Because one can argue either side of this. How were you and, you might say, your colleagues coming down on where we should go?

MCHENRY: Well, I have personally always had three views with regard to sanctions.

The first is that sanctions, in any situation, are a factor. They are not going to be some magic wand. You have to look at them as a factor in trying to promote change.

The second is that, if one embarks upon sanctions, one has to have the necessary domestic and international political consensus. Sanctions that are violated widely or that are seen as premature or that put any particular segment unfairly at a disadvantage are going to be sanctions that will not work. Not only will they not work in that particular instance, but in the long run, their failure to work will undermine the concept of sanctions. People will say, “Sanctions don't work.” It isn't that sanctions don't work, it is that sanctions weren't given a chance to work.

The third thing is that you have to pick the time when you are going to impose sanctions. The reason for them must be clear. They must be carefully targeted.

In the period of time when I was present, we did impose mandatory sanctions on South Africa with regard to arms. We were able to get a political consensus. A consensus that had evaded the Security Council since 1963 we suddenly got at the time of Steve Biko's death. The point is that the death was such an outrageous event that you were able to build the necessary political and...

Q: You have to wait for the event, often, too.

MCHENRY: Well, you've got to wait until the right circumstances.

The only time since that time, while we were there, that I thought that we should give serious consideration to sanctions was when the South Africans in essence turned their backs on the Namibia settlement. I say 'serious consideration' because I'm not sure that I would have come down for sanctions even then. And I'm not sure because I don't think the political consensus was there.

Q: When you talk about political consensus, are you talking both about within the international community and also within the...

MCHENRY: It's both domestic and international. For the United States to embark upon sanctions on an international problem, something which is not a bilateral problem, it seems to me to be almost futile. It's clear that the British and the French and many of the Arab countries, which were supplying oil to South Africa, were not going to go along with it. To force them to vote for it, and then to violate it, didn't make much sense.

Now I think, after 1981, some of South Africa's acts were sufficiently outrageous that it would have been possible to build a political consensus both in the United States and internationally. And I think it was the failure on the part of the administration to undertake the building of that consensus that led to the action of Congress in repudiating the Reagan policy and passing very, very restrictive legislation. You see, once you have even the banks, who are very conservative institutions, saying we want no part of you, it's very difficult for the government to say that there is no basis for sanctions.

Q: Could you recount here about why the Stephen Biko death was so important. You also went there. Could you talk both about what happened and then about your going to South Africa.

MCHENRY: Well, Biko was a young black political leader in South Africa, a part of a relatively new movement, sort of a black-consciousness movement. Very attractive personality, probably with national-leadership potential. He was picked up in South Africa,

for reasons which are still not clear, no legitimate reasons, beaten severely, put in the back of a pickup truck and driven several hundred miles from where he was picked up near his home in the eastern Cape, to Pretoria, and he died.

The South Africans said he died of natural causes. Well, in the first place, he was one of scores of people who were showing up dead after they had been jailed. Secondly, it was particularly inhumane treatment of him. It ended in an uproar. I think the independent autopsy reports from people from outside the country, the investigation into his death, all led to this international revulsion.

The result was that we were able to push through the Security Council a resolution making mandatory what had been a voluntary arms embargo since 1963. It became mandatory. We were able to do it because of the uproar and the feeling that something had to be done to send a message to the South Africans. But we were also able to do it because of some ingenuity between the mission in New York and the legal advisor's office in Washington. We crafted a resolution that didn't declare apartheid a threat to international peace and security, but declared the provision of arms a threat to international peace and security. And the result was that it went through with no opposition.

Q: You went, as the American representative, to the funeral. Were other nations sending representatives, too?

MCHENRY: I don't think that anyone else was, from outside the country. Other nations had their own representatives there. In truth, I had no initial intention of going for the funeral. I was someplace in Africa or Europe and got detoured.

Q: Did this come from Young? Or from the White House?

MCHENRY: I don't know where it came from or whether it originated with me or my staff or someone. I suppose that, like everything, if it was a good idea or a success, it has a thousand fathers, but had it been a failure, it would have been an orphan.

Q: While you were there, did you have any contact with the South African government? I was wondering, were they aware of what this particular outrage had done?

MCHENRY: Oh, yes, I think the South African government was not made up of fools. Now there were those within the police department...I think the police minister's name was Jimmy Krueger, who was particularly crass and would have been a carbon copy of Bull Connor in the United States. But there were others in the South African government, particularly the young South African diplomats, the more worldly ones who'd traveled and been stationed abroad, who were far more sensitive to international opinion, far more likely to reject the kinds of things that they saw going on.

Q: Did this have any effect on the Namibia negotiations at all?

MCHENRY: Oh, I would say that it didn't make my life any easier in those negotiations, because I subsequently went to the Pretoria prison, to visit a leading journalist who had been picked up, a young man who had been a Newman fellow at Harvard. Later, when Chief Kapua was killed in Namibia, I also went to his funeral. And had there been another one, I would have been almost like American vice presidents.

Q: You were the funeral attender.

MCHENRY: Yes.

Q: Were you getting out to the various African states at this time?

MCHENRY: Oh, yes, particularly the Southern African states and the ones that we were trying to work with on the Namibia question. We were in and out of Tanzania, Mozambique, Angola, Zambia.

Q: Were they helpful in a practical way?

MCHENRY: Sometimes.

Sometimes these were simply information visits, exchanges of views. But it was very important to build up a relationship with the leaders, to make sure that they were directly informed of what was going on, as opposed to getting it the old parlor-game way, with whispers going around and the information ending up being distorted.

Sometimes it was very useful, when the negotiations were very difficult. When we were having difficulties with SWAPO (South West Africa People's Organization), for example, on releasing some of the people that were being held in Tanzania, it was very useful to get Nyerere to use the release of those people as leverage to pull SWAPO around. The same thing happened later on in Angola, when the Angolans were very sharp and tough. In one period, we were having difficulty in catching up with Sam Njuma, and the Nigerians virtually sent their air force to find him at his capital.

So, yes, the working relationship was a very valuable one. And I don't mean to imply that we met with agreement everyplace we went. In fact, we met with a combination of suspicion, encouragement, and sometimes a tinge of pride, particularly when they read something in the newspaper of a black American having it out with the South African government. There was a combination of those things.

Q: Was the feeling at the time that, although the United States was a problem and all this, we were the only player in town?

MCHENRY: I think there was a feeling that, finally, the United States was taking a leadership role. Which is what was done. There had been a vacuum, with the exception of the late activities, late in the term of Henry Kissinger.

Q: Why did Henry Kissinger get involved in this?

MCHENRY: Oh, Kissinger's interest in Southern Africa was strictly Cold War. There's no other way of putting it. He had little or no interest in it. Really took very little part in the drafting of the Nixon policies, the so-called NISDs 39. Though people say he did, he really didn't take much of an interest in it.

You could tell Kissinger's interests by what foreign policy he left to the State Department. In the first Nixon term, he left the Middle East and Africa entirely to Bill Rogers. Meaning he had no interest, there was no Cold War crisis coming along, and so we'll let those guys handle it. He became involved in the Middle East, as you remember, particularly in 1973. And it was not until about 1975, after the Angola Resolution, that he started getting involved in Southern Africa. And then it was simply because he saw the Soviets potentially being involved in Angola and Mozambique.

Q: During the early Carter administration, before the Afghan business, how were you all viewing the Soviet role in Africa?

MCHENRY: I think it's fair to say that there was something of a split. Brzezinski saw the Soviets under every rock and behind every door and under every bed. He talked differently, but I think in practice that was his approach. That was the reason for his heavy emphasis on the Cubans. At the time of SHABA I and SHABA II, that was the reason for a really silly policy that he advocated with regard to Somalia, Ethiopia, and the Horn. The tendency on the part of Vance, Dick Moose, Tony Lake and me was to try to treat these problems on their own merits. We saw the Soviets as symptoms of the problem, not the problem. And we were trying to deal with the problem. You see this conflict in the writings of Vance and Brzezinski in their respective memoirs. I think history clearly has proven the Vance approach the correct one. And we share a great deal of the blame, I think, for what we have seen subsequently in Somalia and in Angola.

Q: Our overarming and oversupport of them.

MCHENRY: We acted as if the Horn was a great geostrategic problem, and it was a problem of local concern. We poured in tremendous amounts of arms there. We strengthened the warlords on various sides. We showed, in my view, very little in the way of principle in the Horn. And in Angola, of course, we backed a chap because he was anti-Communist. We paid very little attention to what he had written and said in his earlier life. Well, he turned out to be a person who didn't really believe in democracy. He lost the election, then he decided to pick up and fight.

Q: They're having a very serious civil war there now.

MCHENRY: Which is what it was all along. From the very beginning, it was basically a civil war.

Q: In many of my interviews, I've talked to people who dealt in Africa, African specialists and all, and one of their great complaints was that these were local problems and that we were trying to turn them into Cold War problems. Did you feel a certain sense of relief, as you traveled and talked, that at least now we're looking at the thing in a more realistic way?

MCHENRY: In the final analysis, the Carter policy came down, in my view, on the right side. But it wasn't as clearly on the right side as I would have liked. We were helpful in, I think, resolving the conflict, the differences between Zaire and the Angolans. And we resolved it not on the basis of East-West, but on the basis of what it was, a local conflict. And we were able to engage the Angolans in a dialogue and seek their help on the resolution of the Namibia question. We did not, at least in the early stages, go overboard in trying to help the Somalis. On the other hand, the policies were clearly a compromise. Had we been following the correct policy, in my view, we would have recognized the Angolans. Had we been following a policy that was free of Cold War aspects, we would have dumped that despot in Zaire. We would have probably not given any assistance, certainly not military assistance, to Siad Barre in Somalia.

Q: Was this a debate within both our staff in the United Nations and also in the African Bureau?

MCHENRY: Yes, I think clearly there was a desire in the State Department and at U.S.U.N. and within some segments of the NSC to recognize the Angolans. It was blocked, by bureaucratic means, by Brzezinski. Never blocked directly. He never said, “Mr. President, it's the wrong thing to recognize Angola.” He was more sophisticated than that. He would say, “Well, you've got two thing on your platter right now in the Congress. A third one right now wouldn't be the thing.” Or he would say, “Well, let's tell them we'll recognize them if...”, which is of course conditional recognition. Or he would say, “Well, let's recognize them, but after consultation...” with people whom he knew would leak it in five seconds and build a firestorm against it. I mean, it was that kind of thing.

Q: So I take it that, as far as dealing with Africa, which was pretty much your beat for the first period of your time with the United Nations as a deputy ambassador, Brzezinski was part of the problem.

MCHENRY: Well, Africa was really part of my beat at the time. I was the person in charge of the whole Political Section, and in charge of our preparations for the Security Council. It is true, however, that I spent a great deal of time trying to put together that Namibia initiative, to get it off on the right foot, and to see that it was as successful as we could get it.

Q: Well, then, turning away from the African focus, Vietnam came into the United Nations when you were there. How did we respond to this?

MCHENRY: Well, the Vietnamese were present. It was one of the few places in the world where we could have direct contact with them without worrying about recognition. We had contact with them, we had contact with the Cubans there, we had contact with the

Angolans, whom we didn't recognize either. The only ones that we were forbidden to have contact with were the PLO, which was a pretty silly approach.

Q: The Palestine Liberation Organization.

MCHENRY: But that was domestic American politics; that had nothing to do with international affairs. We carried on a dialogue with both the Vietnamese and the Cubans there. It was there that we agreed to establish the interest sections and to put our people in the various interest sections. With Vietnam, we had a number of sessions.

In fact, it was at one of those sessions that we confronted the Vietnamese with the fact that we had information about an American still in Vietnam. It was a particularly instructive incident. It's the only case of an American actually proven to have been spotted, in all of these years.

Q: Just for the record, this had been a domestic issue, along with who killed President Kennedy.

MCHENRY: And will always be, because the families of the MIAs and those who were thought to have been POWs always want to hold on to something. Their hope is that their loved ones are still alive. Sometimes they are being used by various political movements in the United States.

But, nevertheless, the only time that there was a sighting (which we felt to be very reliable; the information had come to us from the Swedes), I had a session with the Vietnamese ambassador, and I said, “Look, we have this information. Here are the specifics.”

He said, “We'll get back to you.”

And they did. They came back to us and said, “You're right. This chap is there.”

That chap stayed there for a while, subsequently came to the United States, and was tried for desertion.

Q: So, basically, he was there because he wanted to stay there.

MCHENRY: He was there because he wanted to stay. He'd deserted the military, so..

Q: There was a spying scandal, with somebody giving papers to the Vietnamese. I can't remember the details. Did that impact on the United Nations operations or not?

MCHENRY: I don't remember that one.

[FYI, May 19, 1978, Ronald Humphrey, a former USIA employee, and David Truong, a Vietnamese expatriate leader of the U.S. antiwar movement, were convicted of espionage for the Socialist Republic of Vietnam, theft of government documents, and conspiracy to injure the national defense of the United States, and I was a juror at their trial.]

Q: But essentially we found that we could do business with the Vietnamese there.

MCHENRY: Yes, I think you could do business with them. I don't mean to suggest that they had turned the corner, because they had not. But I don't think we were doing everything we could to help them turn the corner, either.

Q: This wasn't that long after we'd left, in '75, and we're now talking about '77, '78, and '79.

MCHENRY: That's right.

Q: How about the Chinese? The Chinese had been in there for a while, and it was just about that time that we gave full recognition to the Chinese. How did we find them at this point?

MCHENRY: We had pretty good relations with the Chinese during this period of time. You have to remember that we were taking major steps in terms of improving our relations and our contacts with them. You have to also remember that the Chinese were in one of their hate-the-Soviets periods. In fact, the language that they used to get to the Soviets was sometimes the harshest language I ever have seen. We had little or no difficulty dealing with the Chinese. They were in a period of time, and to some extent they still are, where they were an actor in the Security Council, but they wanted to sit on the sidelines. If you could just get things down to where they could abstain, they were happy.

Q: How about UNESCO (the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization)? UNESCO became a red flag to the right wing, but also to others.

MCHENRY: Well, UNESCO and FAO (the Food and Agricultural Organization) have always been problems. The ILO was a problem. In fact, the United States had left the ILO in the previous administration. The United States went back into the ILO in the Carter administration. UNESCO was, is, and will always be something of a problem in international affairs. Its mandate is extraordinarily broad. It is dealing with philosophy and ideas. It is dealing with some of the most basic aspects of countries. And in addition to having that problem, it also came up with, in my judgement, poor leadership—someone who was not very skilled politically, though very skilled bureaucratically, and someone who, though worldly, was so sensitive to any suggestion or ideas that didn't originate with him.

Q: Could you talk about who this is and his background.

MCHENRY: This is Imbo. Imbo, Senegalese. He was the first African head of one of the specialized agencies. He therefore resented and thought any suggestion was automatically criticism. He was also, I must say, very French. And there are no more sticklers for protocol, status, culture than French Africans. I mean, the French are tough enough, but when you get the French and the African there, you've got a problem.

Q: It's a little bit like some of the Indians, who've picked up some of the British things there.

MCHENRY: That's right. Absolutely. There are some similarities. There are some similarities.

Q: Did you have much dealings with UNESCO?

MCHENRY: Not much, no, no, no. You don't, in these circumstances. We had to handle UNESCO in the Economic and Social Council and sometimes in the Third Committee at the U.N., but I wasn't that much involved in either one of those.

Q: I take it, in a way, there was a certain amount of relief of keeping us off those.

MCHENRY: Well, the problem increasingly in the late '60s and '70s was that those questions that had been unresolved on the political agenda—apartheid, the Middle East, the Palestinian question—started moving from the political institutions of the U.N. over to the technical ones, the functional ones. So if you didn't get satisfaction that you'd beat up on the South Africans enough in the Fourth Committee or the Security Council, then you'd introduce some resolution in...it didn't matter, IKEO or the Telecommunications Union or the Postal Union or the World Health Organization, something that was beating up on the South Africans. And the same thing happened with regard to Middle Eastern issues. So that these very contentious political questions started moving over to other bodies.

An example: UNESCO, correctly, can talk about education, so you introduce a resolution damning the Israelis for inadequate education for Palestinian children. I mean, there's no end to those kinds of things with the very specialized agencies.

Q: In a way, it served almost as a lightning rod in working out the frustrations, didn't it?

MCHENRY: Oh, yes, and not just in the specialized agencies. I co-chaired the American delegation to a women's conference in Copenhagen, and it was a frustrating event,

because the Africans were intent on making sure that any women's aspect of apartheid that they could come up with was going to be there. And, of course, the Middle Eastern women were intent on making sure that the Israelis were condemned and that the plight of Palestinian children and mothers and so forth was also condemned at this women's conference. It didn't make for a pleasant five weeks. It didn't make the pleasant life in part because of the tactics that these groups were using. But our own reaction sometimes wasn't the best, either.

Q: Could you give some examples?

MCHENRY: Look, I understand. I may not approve, but I understand why the Palestinian women would raise the Palestine question at a women's conference. I understand how it is possible to figure and to say that if you're going to deal with anthropological digs in Mexico, why can't you talk about anthropological digs in the Middle East and how the historic Palestinian or Muslim sites are being mistreated by the Israelis? It's a kind of thing that you have to expect under the kinds of political circumstances that we had.

Q: I take it that the heavy hand of the influence of both American Jews and supporters was a real inhibitor.

MCHENRY: Our policies in the Middle East started, somewhere in the '60s, being so one-sided as to make the United States look, I think, something less than objective.

Q: We lost some of our credibility.

MCHENRY: Yes. Our credibility from that point on was based not on recognition of the United States as being principled and objective, but was based on recognition of the United States as being a power, and a power you had to deal with. It was an unprincipled and non-objective power, but it was a power, and therefore you had to deal with it. Earlier, we were looked upon as principled, objective, and a power.

Q: Was there any debate among the professional staff at the United Nations on the preponderance of our support for Israel? Or did everybody just sort of shrug their shoulders and say, look, this is a battle we're not going to win?

MCHENRY: Oh, I think there was a recognition that it was a battle we weren't going to win. In part it was a battle we weren't going to win because there had been excesses on the part of the Arabs, pushing through the Zionism-is-Racism resolution.

Q: Which came up when?

MCHENRY: Which came up while Moynihan was there. I must say that history will show that Moynihan had a hand in the passage of that resolution himself. He'd been one of its harshest critics, but there are those who would say that his own actions may have facilitated its passage.

But there had been these excesses, and you had acts of terrorism and so forth going on. And American politicians are sensitive to voters and sensitive to who contributes funds to them. Those all play a role in a democratic society.

Q: Speaking of that, we come to the point that elevated you to being the ambassador to the United Nations. Could you give your perspective on Andrew Young and the PLO and his departure from the position?

MCHENRY: Well, I think the first thing to hold in mind is that, from my point of view, Andy's contact with the PLO was not the factor in his leaving. This was a factor in his leaving.

Q: This was 1979.

MCHENRY: There had been an accumulation of events that had brought a great deal of negative publicity. It got so that Andy was constantly making one remark or another that would set off an explosion here or there. Most of those remarks, in the context in which he

meant them and with his thought process, I won't say they were unobjectionable, but they weren't as bad as they came out.

Andy's mind always raced ahead, and he would assume that the listener knew that he wasn't being prejudiced or one-sided and so forth. He'd state the first point, he'd leave out points two and three, and he'd state four. And if you hadn't followed two and three, you would say, “How outrageous,” when he got to four.

I think it was a cumulative process. I think that's the first point I want to make.

The second point is that I don't believe his meeting the PLO would have resulted in his leaving had he been candid about having met them. He was not, in part to try to get what he wanted done, in part out of loyalty to people he didn't want associated with it, and in part because he figured it was no big deal. Now he was being somewhat inconsistent, to figure it was no big deal, but yet to take the kinds of steps that he took.

He was trying to ensure that a series of negotiations then going on would not be adversely affected by having a heated Security Council debate at that time in New York. He thought that he could avoid that by talking directly with the PLO people, and he figured that an informal conversation would do the trick.

Well, of course, it didn't.

The irony is that Andy was the person who told people that he had done what he did. He told, I think, the Israelis himself. And it just ended up in a firestorm.

But I repeat my first point. I don't think that that was the only thing. I think it was cumulative.

Q: Was it just that Andy Young was good copy, and so people were following him more than maybe a less-flamboyant U.N. ambassador? Or was the media out to get him?

MCHENRY: Oh, no, no, the media wasn't out to get him. Most of the media wasn't out to get him. He was good copy. My own view is that, if the media had been out to get Andy, they could have done it a million times and earlier. In many instances, the reporters who were closest to him were the most protective of him. Over and over they would say, “Andy said, this morning...” And it would be something outrageous, but they wouldn't print it. I think, if you talk with the reporters, the major ones, when they printed something that was really outrageous, they were, for the most part, forced to by some of the minor press, the minor media, who would go with the story. And if ABC didn't carry the story, it was holy hell. Lou Chiaffi's editor would have his head if he didn't do it. But would Chiaffi start with that story?

Q: Now Chiaffi was the...

MCHENRY: The ABC correspondent. No, Chiaffi was not going to do that. And Dick Hottelett, of CBS, was not going to do that. But some of these others, yes.

I could see some of these stories developing. I'd start out with Andy in the morning, across the street from the U.N. or something. Andy would say something, and I would quickly tell the press, “Hey, fellas, that's off the record.” And he'd say something else, on the theme that he was developing that day, or whatever he was thinking about that day, and I'd quickly say, “Don't forget, fellas, this is off the record.” Well, I couldn't be with him 24 hours of the day. I knew that, by the end of the day, he was going to say this, whatever it was, and nobody would be around to make sure that it was off the record. That's where the problem came in.

And I must say he was not helped by his own early selection of staff. He had people who were not wise in the way of diplomacy and international affairs. He had a press secretary who, I think, was a mistake. He had an aide who was perhaps very good in constituent services and local politics, but out of his depth.

Q: It's a different world, isn't it?

MCHENRY: It's a totally different world.

Q: I assume that there was a sort of collective training exercise, not only with Young, but also with his personal staff.

MCHENRY: Well, he took much of his personal staff from the House with him to the U.N. Some of them were quite good and were able to make that change. But many of them were not. And I think it was trouble. Now, to be fair, they'd worked with Andy for a very long time. They knew him very well; they knew how he acted in domestic politics, and they were very close to him.

Q: Well, this brings up the transition. He had to leave because, as you say, of the accumulation of things, leaving you, for the time, as the deputy. How soon did your appointment come about, and how did it come about?

MCHENRY: Well, you'll have to remember that I was not the deputy. I was number three in the mission.

Q: Who was number two?

MCHENRY: Number two was James Leonard.

We have five ambassadors at the U.N. Most of the world doesn't know that, but we have five people there, headed by the permanent representative, all with ambassadorial title. It's the only mission in the world where you have two ambassadors extraordinary and plenipotentiary. And it's needed, I can assure you, desperately, because otherwise the demands on the one person would be just about impossible to do.

So, James Leonard—a veteran Foreign Service officer with experience in the Far East, an experienced arms control negotiator, who had left the Foreign Service and was head of the

U.N. Association for the U.S., very close to Vance—was persuaded by Vance to come in and work as Andy's deputy.

And I was in the same boat, brought in to work as Andy's deputy.

I must say that Andy asked, at the time of his appointment, for advice on those major presidential appointments, in which he had a considerable say. And he took that advice quite well. I think that four of the five people who were there were extraordinarily good (obviously, I'm including myself).

And so Jim Leonard was the deputy. Jim, however, had been pulled away to work on the follow-through on Camp David, and was, oh, I would say, 90 percent of the time, in the Middle East, trying to follow through on the autonomy talks and so forth.

The result was that, when Andy was gone, I was running the show. When all of this explosion took place, I was there and had been left in charge. There was all kinds of speculation of who was going to succeed him, and names were tossed all over the place. I remember giving interviews to the New York Times and the Washington Post in which I said I was not a candidate to succeed Andy. I felt that, in the best of all worlds, it ought to be a person very close to the president, and ought to be a political appointment.

I think I continue to look at it that way, provided you can get a political appointee who does not approach the job as if that person is secretary of state, or is running for some higher political office. I think the problems we've had with political appointees in that position have been in those instances where the individuals didn't see themselves as part of a team, and really wanted to be secretary of state or advisor to the president, or were running for president, or, in the case of Pat Moynihan, running for the Senate.

In any event, I got a call from Ham Jordan one evening.

Q: He was what?

MCHENRY: He was chief of staff for the president, and the person closest to Carter. But Ham called me and said that the president wanted to see me. It was the worst time for me to disappear. We were having a small dinner down in lower Manhattan for a staffer who was going away or doing something, and I was supposed to go there. With all the speculation going on, if I disappeared, it would just send the speculation a little wilder.

But I did go down, and saw the president, in the evening. We went upstairs to the family quarters in the White House and sat down and had a very long chat. He said to me that Vance had strongly felt that I should get the job, and that he was going to call Vance and a few others and he'd get back to me. We came downstairs and went out the door on the driveway there on the Ellipse. And I was waiting for my car, which, for some reason, nobody could find. I don't know where the driver was. We were waiting there; the president's standing there and the car's not showing up and so forth. He suggested, “Well, maybe we ought to get one of the White House cars.” Well, for some reason, also, the White House cars...

Q: So much for the vaunted service of the White House.

MCHENRY: I mean, they couldn't be found. And they were going to get one from a garage and have it come over and all that kind of stuff. But my car finally showed up. I was getting into it. He started walking back inside, and he got to the door, and he turned around, and he said he'd changed his mind, the job was mine. So that was that. It wasn't that he'd talked to anybody. Q: I hope you slipped your driver a tip. Well, the United Nations ambassador is sort of a peculiar creature, as you're very familiar. Sometimes he or she is in the Cabinet, sometimes not. The relationship with the secretary or state is one way or another. Was there a treaty when you came in?

MCHENRY: Well, the U.N. ambassador has been in the Cabinet since Henry Cabot Lodge, and was in the Cabinet up until George Bush. Bush made it explicit that Pickering was not going to be in the Cabinet. I think he was trying to avoid the problems that he

had just seen with Jeane Kirkpatrick, and that he'd seen with Andy and Moynihan and Stevenson. I think his analysis was faulty. He seemed to think that it was the Cabinet status that caused the problem. It wasn't, it was the person who caused the problem. He could have had Pickering as a Cabinet post, and it would have been a first-rate position. Ironically, Pickering was removed from that job because he was getting too much publicity. Baker apparently resented it. But if you are doing the job well in a period in which the problems arise in the U.N., there is no way you can avoid prominence and publicity. One ought to be judged on whether you are doing the job well, and one ought to be judged on the basis of whether you are, in a sense, not getting too big for your britches. I think that the person appointed to that position ought to have the necessary relationship with the president and the secretary of state, but to always remember that he or she is not running the State Department, he or she is not running United States foreign policy. He or she is a principal articulator of that policy, almost every day. In fact, I believe, more frequently and on a range of subjects greater than that of the secretary of state.

Q: Because you really have to deal with all of these problems.

MCHENRY: You're dealing with a tremendous range of problems, and the problem you deal with is determined by which room you go into that day. I mean, there are all of these problems being discussed every day, and you have a responsibility for oversight of all of them. I believe very strongly that it is the individual who will make the difference between someone who's successful and someone who fails.

Now I tried to solve the problem of the relationship with the president and the secretary of state by working very closely with Vance. I don't think anyone can cite an instance when the two of us were in any sharp disagreement. The public rarely knew if we were in disagreement, because they wouldn't get it from me, and they weren't going to get it from Vance. I maintained very close contact with him by telephone virtually every day, sometimes several times a day. Saw him once a week; made it a practice to come down to see him. I saw the president at least once a week in the Cabinet meeting. And when I

wanted to see him privately, I did that, much to Brzezinski's great chagrin and dislike. He tried to interfere, on an occasion, and I had to make it clear to him that I was the Cabinet member and he wasn't.

Q: This is where being a Cabinet member was not just a matter of title, but also of clout.

MCHENRY: Yes, a Cabinet member ought to have direct access to the president, and it shouldn't be filtered. It ought to be, when you want it, confidential. And it's not confidential if Brzezinski can have his staff member there. So I had to invite his staff member to leave. When I spotted one in the outer office, I'd say, “You're not going in there with me, buddy.”

I think it's necessary to maintain that close working relationship, and to keep in mind that you are a contributor to the formulation of American foreign policy. And you are one of the articulators of American foreign policy. Now it's true, ...a major articulator, but you are one of the articulators of American foreign policy.

Q: How did Vance view the United Nations?

MCHENRY: Very warmly. He's always been a supporter of the U.N. Still is active in the U.N. Association. Takes a pretty long view on the evolution of the organization. I think, a very warm supporter of it.

Q: How about President Carter?

MCHENRY: I think, philosophically, a warm supporter of it. But sometimes he didn't take the long view. When the Middle East question came up, you saw Carter the supporter of multilateral diplomacy, but you also saw Carter the politician. He had an election coming up. And his staff certainly saw only the election. Bill Maynes, who was assistant secretary for international organization affairs, tells the story of a conversation he had with Ham Jordan. Ham, in essence, said, “How many votes do they have?”

Q: How about Brzezinski? There was obviously the power play and wanting to be involved, but also...

MCHENRY: Not involved, boy, he wanted to run the show.

Q: What did he think of the United Nations?

MCHENRY: I think Brzezinski thinks of the U.N. as a sort of sideshow. Pressed, he might write in more philosophical terms about it, but I think it was not very important.

Q: At the regular Cabinet meetings, did you find that there was much room for talking?

MCHENRY: Oh, no, Cabinet meetings are almost a waste of time. They are too large; the subject matter is too broad. We don't have cabinet government. If we had cabinet government, as they have in the U.K. and other parliamentary systems, it would be quite different, because everybody is responsible for the position that you take on a particular item. But in the absence of cabinet government, the secretary of the interior could not care less about discussing foreign affairs. What he would like to discuss is the interior. So the president inevitably finds himself either concentrating on the issue of the moment, for which he is trying to rally the troops to go out and do whatever they can to support it, or using the Cabinet meeting for those issues that are government wide. You know, “Fellows, we've got the budget coming up, and I want you all to scour your system and cut out some fat.” That kind of thing. But Cabinet meetings probably ought to be done away with.

Q: Well, it's been talked about.

MCHENRY: Well, presidents tend to use them less and less. They start out saying, “I'm going to have Cabinet meetings all the time.” Then they start getting canceled and then called at something other than the time set aside, which creates havoc, because you've got all these busy people and you've changed their schedules. I'm not a fan of the Cabinet meeting.

Q: Why don't we stop here and pick up next time with the major problems that you were dealing with in the '79 to '81 period. Shall we do that?

MCHENRY: Okay.

Q: Today is December 21, 1993, a continuing interview with Ambassador Donald F. McHenry. Don, we talked about relations within the Cabinet and all this. Now what were the major issues that you dealt with, as the United States ambassador to the U.N.?

MCHENRY: Well, the variety included the perennial ones, like the Middle East, which was a constant subject of discussion. It came up in a variety of ways, whether it was some new terrorism event or the desire of the Palestinians to get a resolution on settlements. Afghanistan, of course, was a major issue in the last year of the Carter administration. The continuing one was the hostage crises in Iran, which lasted for the last full year of the administration. We were continuing to deal with African issues. There was the question of Angola. There was the question of apartheid in South Africa. And, of course, we were trying to implement Security Council Resolution 435, on Namibia. There were other things, but I think those were the major ones. Well, I guess I left out Vietnam's move into Cambodia, and the Chinese retaliation, if you will, bloody nose, as they called it, which was their use.

Q: Why don't we talk about that one, Vietnam and China, since you mentioned it. What happened, what was our response, and what were we after?

MCHENRY: Well, as you know, the North Vietnamese moved into Cambodia, pushed out the Pol Pot regime of the Khmer Rouge, and basically installed a Vietnamese-supported government. Which they rationalized on two grounds: first, that they'd done the world a favor by getting rid of the ruthless Pol Pot; second, that they were in essence carrying out the wishes of the Cambodians. I mean, it wasn't a Vietnamese initiative, they said.

You had a whole series of questions that arose as a result of that action. Naturally, Cambodia and Thailand and others in the area looked upon this as the usual actions of an expansionist Vietnam, which had taken over the south of Vietnam and now wanted to extend its hegemony over all of Indochina.

The Chinese were very upset with the Vietnamese. They had been supporters, though embarrassed supporters, of the regime in Cambodia. The Thais were understandably upset, because they saw Vietnam as having greater ambitions than just Vietnam. So you had the ASEAN countries pretty well energized over the issue.

You not only had the issue in Cambodia itself, but that played out in various bodies around the world. It played out in the nonaligned movement, where you had to decide which Cambodian regime was going to occupy the seat of Cambodia. You had, in the United Nations, to decide which Cambodian regime was going to occupy the seat of Cambodia.

In the U.N., it was a particular problem for us. There were many who said that for the United States to favor the former regime's (that is, Pol Pot's regime) holding on to the seat in the U.N. was to be in favor of a butcher, who had killed so many people.

Q: It was one of the most abhorrent regimes to come down the pike.

MCHENRY: It was an abhorrent regime. For the ASEAN countries, however, to favor replacing the former Cambodian regime with the now Vietnamese-imposed regime was to put some kind of stamp of approval on or reward for Vietnam's actions, which they very much feared.

As I say, there was a great public debate over this issue. The debate wasn't just public; the debate was in the U.S. government.

At my own mission at the U.N., there was a sharp disagreement over this issue, with my legal advisor and a group of younger officers strongly believing that we should either

not vote for the seating of either of the regimes (the former Cambodian regime or the Vietnamese-imposed Cambodian regime) or vote for the Vietnamese-imposed regime. Under no circumstances, they argued, should we vote for the seating of the former Cambodian regime.

On the other hand, there was this other view, coming from one or two of my staff, particularly those working on East Asian questions, and many in Washington, though Washington also was split on this issue, but many in Washington, particularly the East Asian Bureau, that for us to make any kind of change in terms of who held the seat, any kind of change, including leaving the seat open, was in essence to reward Vietnamese aggression.

Cyrus Vance writes about the difficulty in making the decision on this question, in his book, his memoirs, Hard Choices. It was difficult because some of my staff used the dissent channel, the direct appeal to the secretary of state, to appeal the decision.

It was a very interesting use of the channel, because when Herb Reese, the legal advisor, came to me with his and some of the staff's intention to use that channel, I took the position that I did not favor changing the previous position of the United States in any way. I didn't favor leaving the seat vacant. I didn't favor, in essence, recognizing the aggressive actions of the Vietnamese. I said to them, however, “If you are going to dissent, make your dissent stronger than what you are presenting here.” I actually helped them craft their dissent; however, held firm in my own recommendations in my own view.

Well, all of this went down to the secretary, in the dissent channel, for the young people. The secretary agonized over it, and he came down on the position of not changing the seating of Cambodia in any way.

Q: Why do you think there was this split between, you might say, the younger and then the more experienced, professional people?

MCHENRY: Well, it wasn't just the younger; my legal advisor was an older chap. It was a combination of things. A concern about human rights. As they saw it, the Vietnamese, perhaps in the wrong way and perhaps for the wrong reason, had done the world a favor in getting rid of Pol Pot, and that we ought not pay so much attention to how it was done or for what reason, we ought to try to work with the new situation. There were others, including the strongly held view of those who wanted to take into account the ASEAN countries, who felt that you just simply could not make the change, in view of the historic positions of the ASEANs vis-#-vis Vietnam. It was a tough, tough question.

In any event, we, having decided our position, then had to pull the rest of the U.N. around with us. And we did. We succeeded in the General Assembly in rejecting the idea of having no one sit in the seat of Cambodia, or in having the Vietnamese-imposed government sit in the seat of Cambodia. In essence, we had no change.

I felt strongly that we were not putting a stamp of approval on Pol Pot and his regime. That we were faced with a very difficult, unpleasant choice, neither of which one could be proud. I think I said to the press that there are some times when you hold your nose and vote. And that's precisely what we did: we held our noses and voted.

I must say that, for years after then, the General Assembly, including many of the nonaligned countries, took the same position as the United States did, that you could not have political change as the result of aggressive action by Vietnam.

But it was a difficult decision for us. It was a decision for which we were roundly criticized by those who placed more weight on the human-rights side of the issue and less weight on the political and strategic side of the issue.

Q: Our vote kept us from getting into the position of saying, well, there are good invasions and bad invasions, and all that sort of thing.

MCHENRY: I think so. You will remember that we had a similar situation with Tanzania and Uganda. There is no question but that the regime of Idi Amin was a horrible regime. Perhaps, in 1993, the world would countenance some kind of aggressive enforcement action to change the regime in Uganda. But we were living under the rules of the time. And you have to maintain some basis for world order. There have to be some ground rules. Ground rules change, but abrupt change is not in the interest of world order. In the case of Uganda, Tanzania actually waited until Uganda attacked Tanzania before it went in and got rid of Idi Amin. And then the world applauded. But the world was applauding Tanzania's getting rid of Idi Amin in the process of defending order, in the process of defending the borders of Tanzania.

Q: When did this happen?

MCHENRY: Oh, that was during the time that I was there. I'm terrible on dates. I think it was about 1978. [Invasion was October 1978; Amin fled city April 13, 1979.]

Q: Did it come to a vote?

MCHENRY: No, it didn't, because it never really came up in the U.N. Uganda went into Tanzania, and Tanzania was sitting there waiting for Uganda to make a false move. And as soon as they did, they went in and removed Idi Amin. That's all there was to it.

But Cambodia was a difficult question. And Cambodia, as you know, was not resolved until many, many years later, 1992-93, after Vietnam had pulled out of Cambodia, and after the United Nations had gone in and supervised an election.

Q: Coming back to what is always a troubling relationship, the one in the Middle East. During your time as the ambassador, how did you deal with this? One, you were obviously in New York, where there is an intense Zionist Jewish lobby. We are the major defenders of Israel. Israel is always retaliating their votes against it. Zionism is Racism. This whole

thing. During the time you had the watch, what were the issues and how did you deal with them?

MCHENRY: I think, of all the issues that I dealt with, this was the most difficult. It was the most difficult because we had long since ceased dealing with this issue, as I viewed it, on its merits. It had become a part of American domestic politics. And the various parties had set out to use the United Nations as a sort of chessboard, if you will.

The Arabs, frustrated by their inability to get the Israelis to carry out numerous resolutions of the U.N., and frustrated by their constant defeat on the ground militarily, decided to use the United Nations as a forum in which they could constantly pass resolutions denouncing Israel.

And that was easily done in the General Assembly, where the majority of the membership disapproved of the heavy use of military action by Israel. They did not agree with the taking of territory by force, as Israel had done in the '67 War. They favored the idea of self-determination for the Palestinians.

On the other hand, the Israelis, in part, I think, because their position was weak substantively on some of the issues (self-determination, the taking of territory by force, the treatment of people in captured territory), sought to make the U.N. useless, to remove any moral legitimacy from the U.N. Their strategy, it seems to me, was to work toward a situation in which any action of the U.N. would be dismissed as hopelessly anti-Israeli, rather than objective.

Frankly, I think the Arab states played right into Israel's hands when they passed resolutions like Zionism is Racism. Now that is a resolution, obviously, that was ridiculous on its face. The Arabs were really trying to say something else. But, nevertheless, it was ridiculous on its face. I don't believe that that ridiculous action, however, removed the legitimacy or balance or objectivity of the U.N. on some of the other substantive questions,

like the settlements, like violations of the Geneva Accords, like disproportionate use of force, like self-determination.

But I believe strongly that there was this strategy, after a while, on the part of the Israelis, to try to work towards a situation in which the U.N. actions could be dismissed. And I believe that the Arabs, stupidly, fell right into that strategy.

Q: What type of instructions, dialogue were you having on this? Here you were, trying to defend the U.N. as an instrument of American foreign policy.

MCHENRY: Well, quite frankly, I never felt that the United States was objective on questions of the Middle East. We had a number of examples of this. We have historically held some positions that quite sharply disagreed with the Israelis. On Jerusalem, for example.

Q: Jerusalem being the capital, an amalgamation...

MCHENRY: Israel believes that Jerusalem is the capital of Israel forever more. We believed, and I think it's still the official policy, that the status of Jerusalem is still up in the air. At the time, the Israeli government took the position that virtually all of the territory occupied after '67 was part of Eretz Israel, greater Israel. We didn't take that position. Israel, at the time, was on an aggressive settlements program, believing that if you settled Israelis in the various portions of the occupied territories, it made it almost impossible for them to withdraw at a later stage. We felt strongly that the placement of settlements was politically, if not legally, unwise.

We were constantly in these tugs with the Israelis. The question was: How did we express it in the United Nations?

The Arabs came around to the point where they started, very shrewdly, drafting resolutions that were almost exact reflections of American foreign policy. And they would put such

resolutions on the table. We, then, were left in the position where there was a tremendous amount of political pressure in the United States for the United States not to vote yes, not to abstain, but to vote no on resolutions that were reflections of American policy.

Now in an earlier period, pre-Kissinger, we treated each resolution on its merits. If it was the Arabs who were wrong one day, we would say so. If it was the Israelis the next day, we would say so. But somewhere along the line, in the Kissinger days, we came into this idea that every resolution had to be "balanced." So that if the Arabs did something bad one day, you wrote a resolution that also reflected that the Israelis had done something. And if the Israelis did something bad one day, you wrote a resolution that reflected the context that the Arabs had done something. Well, this meant that all of the parties could always escape any blame. And it put you in a position where you were pretty well out of the game.

Q: Was this deliberate?

MCHENRY: Well, I don't know whether it was deliberate or not, but I think it was a great strategy, because the United States moved from where it took a position on the merits and it voted for many of these resolutions to the point where we were asked to abstain, to the point where the Israelis were bold enough to expect us to vote no on issues even if they reflected American policy.

This became a very difficult thing for us. There was a point, before I became permanent rep. but while I was there, where, on a settlements question, the resolution was not what we wanted, but virtually identical to American policy, and the differences could easily be negotiated out. One of the ambassadors, Dick Petri, who was handling the question, very easily negotiated the resolution around to the point where it could have been written in the American State Department. Well, having done all of that, the instructions from Washington came back that the United States should vote against it. It was an embarrassing vote, which was difficult, if not impossible, to explain.

A similar situation arose in 1980. We knew that there was going to be a resolution on the settlements question. There had been a committee established in 1979, and its report was going to come in. We knew it was going to come up.

In fact, in January of 1980, I went to the Middle East. I went to Lebanon and Jordan and Israel and Egypt. And when I was in Israel, I asked the Israelis what they expected us to do. They were proceeding, for their own domestic political and ideological reasons, to establish settlements one after the other, placing us in an impossible situation. We had Camp David that we were trying to get the Arab world to accept. We had negotiations going on to implement some of the Camp David Accords, and the Israelis were being difficult on those negotiations. And they were proceeding with the settlements questions. Well, the Israelis gave us little comfort on settlements; they clearly were going to go right ahead with them. And I expressed to them while I was there that they were putting us in a very untenable situation.

Well, it had little or no effect. We found ourselves faced with that resolution on the settlements. Again, it was a resolution that when I looked at it I saw was virtually identical with American policy. I knew that it wouldn't take very much negotiating to get it around to the point where it could have been written in the State Department.

But after talking with Vance, in one of my regular Monday morning sessions with him, we concluded that it was simply not something that we ought to do.

So I came back to New York and I said to the staff, “We'll have nothing to do with the resolution. In fact, the worse it is, the better for us, because then we can justify our position. Don't do anything to improve it. Leave it right the way it is.”

And we did nothing to it, except that someplace in Washington, whether it was in the IO Bureau or NEA I have no idea, they looked at the resolution and they said, “Hey, this is

virtually identical with our policy. If we can make little changes here, little changes there, we can support it."

So that was communicated to us in New York, and I responded that we would do nothing to improve the resolution unless Washington could assure us in advance that it would vote for the resolution.

Well, we were given that assurance about one o'clock.

Q: Who was the head of IO at that time?

MCHENRY: Bill Maynes. But Bill wasn't there that day. Mike Newlin was in charge, his senior deputy. And Hal Saunders was head of NEA.

We were told, after a discussion with the secretary, presumably, who had had a discussion with the president, presumably, that we should go ahead.

I took the call at the residence, at 42A, at a luncheon that I was having for a number of U.N. representatives. And at that luncheon was the Tunisian representative, who was the Arab in charge of the negotiations. So I quickly negotiated out the necessary changes with him and informed the Israelis we were going to vote for the resolution. They seemed to be resigned to the fact. They themselves knew it was consistent with American policy.

So we went into the Security Council meeting that afternoon, at about four o'clock, with everybody knowing (because the word spreads very quickly) that the United States was going to vote for this settlements resolution.

Somewhere around six o'clock, while the session was still going, we got a call from Washington. They wanted to negotiate some further changes.

Well, I blew my stack on the telephone, because I had earlier said to them that we wouldn't improve that resolution, we wouldn't do anything to be involved in it, unless we had prior

approval of the text. Now, with the word out of how we were going to vote, Council in session, vote expected momentarily, they were asking for a further change, and I thought it was unreasonable.

I nevertheless asked for the adjournment of the Council until Saturday morning.

I went back to the office and wrote a very long cable, in which I recounted everything that had gone on, and said they had put us in an impossible position. My recommendation was that the United States vote for it, that the minor changes they wanted could be explained in explanation of vote, which is a normal procedure, happens on the floor of the Security Council every time, happens on the floor of the United States Senate all the time.

Well, we were told, on Saturday morning, to vote for the resolution. Presumably there had been further discussions in Washington. I wasn't there, so I don't want to recount what went on in Washington. But we were told to vote for the resolution, which we did.

There was resignation on the part of the Israelis. Joy on the part of the Arabs, because for the first time in a long time, we had returned to taking a position on substance. Even the news media picked it up, that we had finally voted with our policy. Our embassy in Israel sent back a message saying the Israelis were relaxed about this. They expected it, after McHenry's visit in which he told them that they were putting us in an untenable position. There was not very much concern about it—until the political machine started kicking in.

The Israeli ambassador in Washington, who apparently had been out of town, returned, concerned, I guess, about what kind of criticism he was going to undergo because he hadn't kept Washington in line. People in the administration who saw an election coming up in 1980 were concerned about what the Jewish community was going to do in terms of their votes and their money. All kinds of problems.

And the State Department, that Sunday evening, put out a very curious response to a news inquiry. I wasn't consulted about the response. And when I asked later why I was not

consulted, someone came up with the lame idea that I wasn't available, they couldn't find me. Well, as you know, the one thing that is not true in that position is that you can't be found. I mean, my children used to complain that I could be found anywhere, even in the john.

It got caught up in American domestic politics. By the next day, Monday, I was in Washington, as I usually was on Mondays, and we were dealing then with a firestorm.

Bill Maynes, the assistant secretary, had now returned. He was concerned that I hadn't been consulted about this statement before, as rightly he should have been, because I was really teed off about it. There were meetings going on all over the place.

Finally, that evening, Monday evening, there was a meeting in the White House, in which the deputy secretary, Christopher, was present; the vice president was present; Mr. Linowitz, who was negotiating the Camp David autonomy talks, was present; and I was present. Secretary Vance was just coming back and was not there at the beginning of the meeting, but he arrived while the meeting was going on. And the president came in to the meeting while it was going on. The vice president took a call, and the call was from the Israeli ambassador.

Well, it was pretty clear to me that the decision had already been made with regard to what we had done, that the administration was trying to, in essence, back out of the vote, and they were trying to put together a statement. Now the first draft of that statement was something that I made very clear was unacceptable to me, because it implied that we had, in New York, somehow gone against American policy, voted contrary to our instructions, and so forth. I said that was unacceptable. Christopher also took the position that they could not put out any kind of statement that had any implication that I had not done everything in accord with U.S. policy and instructions. But it was clear that some kind of statement was going to come out.

The president came in. The president said he didn't understand the vote, didn't give any instructions to vote the way we did. And, frankly, that was that. We put out a statement that implied that, somewhere between the president and the secretary and U.S.U.N., there was a garble. But it clearly did not state that we had carried out the instructions incorrectly.

Well, I said, during the meeting, that the kind of statements that we were putting out and the questioning of the position that we were taking was going to make it impossible for us with all the constituencies. It was going to tell the Jewish community in the United States that it could browbeat the administration, no matter what the substance was. It was going to give that same message to the Arabs. And it was going to tell the Arabs that we were not dependable even after there was an agreement, and we were not dependable even if the substance of the resolution was the same as our policy. Moreover, it was going to raise questions about our policy: Did we stand by our policy, or didn't we stand by our policy?

Well, I think my prediction was borne out, because in all of this row, which you can imagine got the attention of every newspaper and all of the media in the world, there resulted a congressional hearing in which the secretary of state was pointedly asked, “If that resolution isn't your policy, what is your policy?”

And the secretary of state had to answer that our policy is what is in the resolution.

That response, which the secretary in essence was forced to give, met with outrage on the front page of The New York Post, which, as you know, is a very pro-Israel newspaper and hasn't had an objective spine in its body in the last 30 years.

It also outraged Mrs. Carter, who was an understandably strong cheerleader for the president's reelection. She makes it clear in her book that Vance had somehow undercut the administration and the president's reelection.

All of this occurred, mind you, on the eve of the New York primary. So you could not have had a more politically sensitive question arise at a politically sensitive time.

Well, Mrs. Carter's views, at least on this issue, I think, can be dismissed as not really objective on the issue.

But there is no question but that the position that we took probably reinforced among the Jewish community and among the Israelis an underlying concern about President Carter and the Middle East. Their concern was that Carter's general position on the Middle East was such that if he got reelected and was therefore free of domestic pressures, he might be unpredictable and less pro-Israeli in his quest for a settlement of the whole Middle East issue. And therefore there was a view, which was pretty widespread in that community, and I think the election bore it out, that Carter had been good for Israel in his first term on the Camp David issue, but watch out if he became “independent.” He lost much of the Jewish community's vote over this general issue. Not on settlements; settlements crystallized this concern.

Frankly, I think they were right. I think Carter, had he been reelected, would have pressed very hard on the substance of the issues, that he would have been less politically constrained, and that he would have done what the United States ended up doing years later anyway. Years later, we ended up having talks with the PLO, withholding funds from Israel on loan guarantees unless they stopped settlements, and a whole series of other things. In other words, years later, we did exactly what had always been the policy of the United States.

Now you can argue about timing and so forth, but we can't pick our times on these issues. They arise sometimes at inopportune times. And sometimes the fact that it is an inopportune time is a reason for not voting for it. I don't quarrel with that. What I quarrel with is having decided to vote. We then pulled back.

Q: What did this do to you personally, how you felt about this administration and about your staff and also the role in the United Nations?

MCHENRY: It was a difficult period. I had scheduled a meeting for Tuesday morning, a foreign policy magazine briefing, and all the press, needless to say, was present. Not only that, but I had on my schedule for Tuesday a major briefing in the State Department, which drew, needless to say, a rather large crowd. And in both instances, I was peppered with questions about what went on. First, was it a repudiation of me? Absolutely not, was my position. I had taken care of that in the meeting in the vice president's office the night before, though I didn't tell people what had gone on in that. But I did point out that they'd find nothing in any of these statements that was a repudiation of me.

By the way, I had, the night before, made it clear that I wanted nothing in the statements—and I didn't want any unsourced information—saying that we were responsible. I think they pretty well stuck to that, too.

So it was not a repudiation of me, I said.

I took the position that we had indeed followed American policy. I discussed the substance of the question. I tried to explain, as best I knew, what the thinking of the president was. And as best I could put together, the thinking of the president was as follows: Yes, it is the policy of the United States on settlements as that resolution said. Yes, that's our policy with regard to Jerusalem. But somewhere in the past, during the period when Ambassador Goldberg was there, we had moved to not stating our policy, but referring to an earlier statement of our policy. That at Camp David, Begin had succeeded in getting the United States not even to refer to the Goldberg statement that referred to the statement of the policy. And so the president had somehow been persuaded that it is our policy, but we wouldn't state our policy. And so here we were, stating our policy.

Well, sort of convoluted, I guess. I've not heard the president's explanation of it; I still don't know his explanation of it. But it was a very difficult period.

In the U.N., it brought a snicker or two. (See, the United States can't state its own policy. See what the influence of the Israeli lobby is on the American government.) For some, particularly among the more liberal, and particularly among the black community, the question was asked, “Are they trying to sacrifice McHenry as they sacrificed Andrew Young?” I don't believe Young was sacrificed, but nevertheless that's the kind of thinking that was there.

I'm confident that the thing that ultimately carried the day, in terms of my relations in the U.N., my relations with Washington, and my relations with the press, was that there was a certain amount of respect for me as a professional. And no one had any smoking gun.

That didn't stop some people, who should have known better, from acting irresponsibly. And one of the most irresponsible was Moynihan.

Q: Patrick Moynihan. He was a senator by that time?

MCHENRY: He was a senator by that time.

Q: But he had been ambassador to the U.N.

MCHENRY: He had been ambassador to the U.N., from New York, obviously. Moynihan wrote a column in Commentary magazine, a column which appeared in January of 1981, in which he implied that I had violated my instructions. He had no basis for the implications. It was a vicious piece, obviously written with a lawyer at his side. It was part of an exchange that I had had with Moynihan, which the public doesn't know about. And it reflected very poorly on him, in my view. I have, frankly, no respect for him even to this day because of it.

The exchange was his having somehow been insulted that he wasn't treated in the way he wished to be treated by those who had succeeded him. He hadn't been invited to New York to the mission, hadn't been invited to the residence, in the years in which he had been gone. Why he should want to take his concerns about numerous people out on me I don't know.

But in any event, having found that out, I did invite him. I wrote him a note, “Come up. Let's have dinner. We can sit around. Let's chew the fat.”

He didn't respond at all, until he sent me a copy of his Commentary article. And that was his response.

Q: That was very petty of him.

MCHENRY: It was a ridiculous, petty position on his part. He's a very bright, but very mercurial, individual. I hope his good deeds outweigh and outlive the pettiness, which I have seen in him, in any event.

By the way, that experience led me to change my way of dealing with Washington. I knew then that I had to use the telephone less, in informal discussions, informal exchanges of views, instructions and so forth. That I had to deal with the political element of Washington on these issues. (That's not the State Department, that's the White House.) And that I had to do so in a way in which my views would come through without the filtering of the bureaucracy. So from that point on, when it came to dealing with Middle East questions that I thought were controversial, I waited until the end to send my recommendation, and I sent it by Cherokee.

Q: Would you explain what Cherokee is.

MCHENRY: It is a message that goes directly to the secretary of state and the president. It doesn't go to the Bureau. If the secretary wishes to distribute it further, that's his decision.

But my concern was to get my views directly to the secretary and to the president, and make my recommendations.

Now even that ended up as controversial, because, at least on one occasion, towards the end of the administration, I sent a Cherokee message in which I had given Secretary Muskie advance warning.

I had said to him that I didn't think the settlements issue, on which there was such great controversy, was an issue of principle. Timing, whether you say things or don't say things or bring a statement, those were all involved in that. You can have policy differences on it. I didn't like the way it was done, but those were policy differences. It would have been a principle had they sought to finger me as the one responsible for the back dragging. But they didn't, so there was no principle involved.

But I had warned him that we an issue coming that was a question of principle, as far as I was concerned, and that I would send my recommendation down, and I wanted to warn him in advance.

It happened to involve some political figures that Israel had kicked out of the occupied territories. We had, over a period of time, insisted on letting the judicial process go its normal way before we took a position. The judicial process had gone its normal way, and the Israelis, in essence, had rejected the outcome. So I took the position that we've insisted on following due process, due process has been followed, now you've got to take a position.

So I sent a Cherokee on that, and I got back the response, which accorded with my recommendation that the United States should vote for it.

In the White House, the chap who was the liaison to the Jewish community was absolutely furious. I don't know whether he was furious because he'd been bypassed in the process and the recommendation hadn't come to him, or whether he was furious over the

substance. I suspect it may have been some of both. But he didn't like the idea and said something to the effect that that was what he was there for, and we get in trouble when these kinds of things are done. My response, “Well, that's the president's job. If the president wants you to be involved in it, the president will involve you. I can't run how the president makes his decisions.”

Well, there, too, was an issue in which we were criticized. The Washington Post wrote an irresponsible editorial in which they called it “The Day of the Jackals,” or some such stupidity. And the pro-Israeli-lobby flack, The New Republic, did something similar.

But I'm convinced that the procedure of going over the heads and dealing at the level in which I was dealing was the correct thing to do. It was the lesson that I got out of the settlements issue. It didn't mean that I was any less inclined to talk with the bureaucracy. I did. And I suspect that none of them was ever surprised by my recommendations. They just didn't see them until they had arrived above their heads.

Q: Well, turning to the Iranian revolution and the taking of our embassy. The whole thing, again, while you were in command at the U.N. How did this play out?

MCHENRY: Well, this was something that consumed our time, frankly. It took the last full year of the administration. I don't know where I was when the embassy was taken over. For some reason, I think I was in Geneva, doing some negotiations on Namibia. I think I had just arrived. I am sure I hadn't been there 24 hours, when the secretary asked that I come back to New York. I did and found this very difficult question.

Frankly, when it occurred, I didn't expect that it was going to be something that would last.

Q: Because there had been a seizure that spring that only lasted a few days.

MCHENRY: And taking over an embassy and holding diplomatic personnel was something that was unheard of, even in the Second World War. Diplomats were shipped home when

the war broke out, or if they were in any way interned, you knew they were perfectly safe. Here was a situation where the embassy was taken over and that wasn't the case. Well, frankly, even here, in our initial dealings with the then-government of Iran, there were all kinds of indications that this thing was going to be worked out.

Well, we discovered, of course, that the then-government didn't have control of the hostages and that its influence was very limited. That early discovery was something that plagued the negotiations on the hostages throughout the time that they were there. The point is that, in all of the negotiations, for most of that year that they were held, we found ourselves negotiating with groups that did not have the power they pretended to have and/or were vying for power with other factions.

It was only after the power relations within Iran were themselves settled, in terms of who was in control of things, that we started making progress with regard to the negotiations on the hostages. And that was months after they were taken into custody by the Iranians.

Well, at the U.N., we started out on what one would expect. First, the reasonably pointed, but, in retrospect, mild, resolution calling for the observance of diplomatic immunity and no taking of hostages and respect for diplomatic establishments and that kind of thing. We then moved towards denunciation of these actions; then calling on the secretary-general to go over there and have some talks with them; calling on the president of the Assembly to use his good offices to do various things. Now we were getting to coercive measures: the use of sanctions.

Each one of these steps was looked upon at the time as a pretty harsh measure. They weren't, but nevertheless, we were escalating the pressure, at least the international pressure.

I think we felt that what we were doing was using a combination of things. We were trying to, in the International Court, make it clear that the Iranians were legally unjustified. We were trying to make it clear, in various places like the EEC and other organizations, that

they were in violation of legal and political norms. We were doing that in the Security Council and in the General Assembly. And then we were also starting to put pressure on Iran economically and diplomatically.

We had numerous Security Council meetings on this question—some formal meetings, that is, public meetings, and numerous informal meetings, consultations-in-a-back-room kind of thing.

At the same time, there were discussions going on in every channel that anybody could imagine, whether it was through people who had known Khomeini in Paris, or people who had known him someplace else, or any kind of avenue that could be used. And you tended to take a hard look at every avenue, no matter how far-fetched it was. You couldn't afford to ignore it, because it just might be the key to unlocking the door.

We finally, in the Security Council, came to the question of sanctions on Iran. A lot of people had argued for a long time that the U.N. was somehow anti-American, the non-aligned were anti-American, which I didn't find to be true. And a number of newspaper writers noted that we were able to work with the non-aligned in a way in which the United States had not been able to work for a number years. But the question arose: Are we going to get the votes in the Security Council on Iran?

We worked very hard to get the votes, with the president also being very much involved in making a phone call here and there.

We ended up getting the votes that we needed, though the Soviets abstained.

Q: The Soviets were in a difficult position.

MCHENRY: Very difficult position.

Q: Because they invaded Afghanistan almost immediately thereafter, in December of '79

MCHENRY: That's right. Well, it was a difficult position for the Soviets because, on the one hand, they wanted to curry favor with the Iranians and replace the United States. On the other hand, the Iranians, if they considered the United States devil number one, devil number two surely must have been the Soviet Union. So they had to be careful of how they were operating. And in fact, as you know, in some of the early days, Soviet diplomats were held as well. The Soviets were not the ones that we thought would be difficult. We thought they would end up abstaining.

We had problems with the Chinese. We had problems with Bangladesh. We had problems with the British and the French.

Q: Why the British and the French?

MCHENRY: The British and the French were like all countries are in these situations: if there are sanctions, they want to make sure that their people are not hit as hard; they want to reduce the pressures upon themselves. So we had a lot of behind-the-scenes negotiations with them.

The press was saying that we were having trouble with the non-aligned, but we weren't. The problem was with some of our allies in negotiating the resolutions.

The Bangladesh representative I remember so very well. His name was Kaiser. (A strange name for a Bangladeshi, but nevertheless, his name was Kaiser.) He was extraordinarily distraught. The Bangladeshi were concerned about the pro-fundamentalist movements in their own society, and what would they think if they voted with the United States? On the other hand, Bangladesh is now, was then, and, some would say, always will be a basket case, and they were very dependent upon the United States for food. And he was concerned that if they abstained or voted no, what would the United States do in terms of humanitarian assistance to them?

Well, we told him to vote the way he felt he should vote. I said, “Look, if you abstain, you abstain. We won't like it, but we provide food on humanitarian grounds, not on political grounds.”

They abstained.

The Chinese abstained. The Chinese abstained with the explanation that someone had to be free to talk with the Iranians in the future.

But we had the votes anyway. We had a lineup of the other non-aligned, including Jamaica, which many Americans were thinking was anti-American.

Q: It was under Manley at that time, wasn't it?

MCHENRY: It was Manley.

So we weren't that concerned about that resolution. We got it through.

In the course of that year, I went off to Morocco and Algeria, in the summer of 1980, I think it was July. I went off to Morocco and Algeria for talks with the king of Morocco on (a) the western Sahara, and (b) the hostage question. The king made a few nice-sounding words about the hostages, but it was clear to me that he didn't see that he had much of a role.

Algeria, on the other hand, was a different story. The Algerians, then, had a reputation of being superb diplomats, of taking knotty issues like this, using their ability to talk to all parties, and coming out with some reasonable resolution of them. They had done it before on a number of airplane hijackings and that kind of thing.

I went to see the Algerian foreign minister, a very tall, extraordinarily thin, chain-smoking, extremely articulate, extremely bright man, who I believe was subsequently killed in an airplane accident. In the course of the discussion, he made it clear that Algeria was willing to be helpful in negotiating with the Iranians. But, on the basis of some of their discussions

to that point, their sort of informal soundings, they didn't believe that the situation was ripe for them to intervene. They were willing to do so, but just not right then.

It was, I think, an understandable position. In fact, I believe that there are times when it is not only useless, but perhaps counterproductive, to attempt to resolve a problem, and that you simply have to wait until the parties come to the conclusion that they have an interest in resolving the problem.

The result was that the Algerians did indeed wait and, as you know, later did jump in with both feet and were the instrument in resolving the hostage question.

Q: Here was an issue that was politically and morally and everything else urgent. What sort of a reception did you get when you told the State Department that the Algerians weren't ready to do anything?

MCHENRY: I think the response was sort of an acceptance; glad that they were willing to become involved. It was very difficult to argue with their logic.

Quite frankly, I agreed with their logic. As long as you still had the jockeying for power in Iran, there was very little progress that was going to be made, because any discussions would be with people or entities whose ability to deliver on any agreement was in question. Only after you knew that they could deliver could negotiations possibly have the best chance of succeeding. I think, by that time, most of those intimately involved with the question had reached that conclusion.

That didn't say that you didn't have to keep trying every other element there was, because if you didn't, you'd be accused of being somehow insensitive to the capture of Americans.

In retrospect, I think, while we should have continued trying every other element, we probably should have been doing it on a much more relaxed and much more private basis, and with less preoccupation than we were. In a sense, we were probably confirming to

those in Iran that there was a reason for jockeying for power, that we were in essence part of the power struggle. Perhaps if we had been a little more relaxed and taken the hostages off the front pages, it would have been less of an issue in the power struggle in Iran, and might have brought that struggle to a head sooner. I don't know what the answer to that is.

Q: No, you never do know. But, of course, the media was pounding away on this every day.

MCHENRY: The media was pounding away every day. And we probably would have been sharply criticized for not paying attention to it, not giving it the priority that people thought it deserved. And they looked upon priority as action.

Ironically, in later hostage questions, we were more relaxed. It wasn't the constant front-page question. But, indeed, there was criticism of the administration for seeming to not care.

I don't know what the answer to that is. I don't think you can put the holding of civilian hostages on the same level as that of the holding of diplomatic representatives. I think they are probably different things politically. The profile is different. And maybe you simply cannot push a diplomatic hostage-taking to the...

Q: The other event that was going concurrently with this was the Soviet invasion, interference, whatever you want to call it, in Afghanistan. They came in in December of 1979, and the hostage thing started in November of '79.

MCHENRY: That's right.

Q: How did this play out while you were there?

MCHENRY: Well, it meant we were juggling two hot potatoes at the same time.

The Afghanistan question arose, as you know, in a very dramatic way, with the Soviets going into Afghanistan saying that they were invited there by the government. But, of course, in the process of their going in, the head of the government was killed and replaced by an Afghan who had been in the Soviet Union previously.

That question immediately came to the U.N., and there was a debate in the Security Council on it. It was the kind of question on which the Security Council is likely to be inevitably deadlocked, because it involves the veto powers. In this case, not just veto powers, but the two superpowers. The founders of the U.N. took the position that if an issue came to the U.N. that one of the permanent members felt very strongly about, you were inevitably going to have deadlock. But you'd have that deadlock whether the U.N. existed or didn't exist, as a practical matter.

When Afghanistan came to the Security Council, we had to decide ourselves who was going to take the lead. My concern at the time was that Afghanistan not be seen as a U.S.-Soviet conflict, because that would allow too many countries in the U.N. to duck taking a position. It had to be seen, I thought, as the Soviet Union going into a non-aligned country, with the United States taking a position on it just as any other country would take a position.

That was very hard to do in the climate we were in. We were in the Cold War, and anything the Soviets did was looked upon as a barometer of their worthiness to be dealt with by the United States as a decent country. It was looked upon as an indicator as to whether agreements reached with the Soviet Union were agreements reached with a rational and reliable partner. If you couldn't count on the Soviet Union to act legally and sensibly and morally correctly in Afghanistan, for example, what good was it to reach an agreement with the Soviet Union on SALT?

Q: Strategic Arms Limitation Talks.

MCHENRY: SALT II, where we had just negotiated an agreement with the Soviet Union. And that agreement was up for ratification by the...

Well, they went into Afghanistan for reasons that are now becoming clear ('now' being 1993), but which people speculated about in 1979. And the speculation was as wild as the speculation got during the Cold War. The Soviet Union was making a move towards a warm-water port. The Soviet Union was making a move to influence the oil countries in the Middle East. The “Arc of Crisis” is what Brzezinski called it. The Soviet Union's actions in Afghanistan, together with their actions in Ethiopia, together with the turmoil that was going on in Iran, was all placing this Middle East area, vital to the United States, in great jeopardy.

I, frankly, never bought any of that. I try to look at the actions of a country and figure it out. As I saw it then, and do now, there was a bunch of old men concerned that a country that had come within their influence was about to be lost as a result of the heavy-handed actions of someone who was pro-Soviet. In other words, the Afghan government was so bad towards the population that it was stirring up fundamentalist Muslim resentment. And if the Soviets didn't watch out, instead of having a pro-Soviet government on their hands, or a government that was friendly, they might have a fundamentalist government on their border. Not only would they have lost this friendly government, but it might spread over to the whole of the underbelly of the Soviet Union, which, as we know, has lots of Muslims in it. I did not see it as necessarily a threat to Pakistan. Not that it couldn't have been in the long term, but I didn't see it as necessarily one. And I didn't see warm-water port and all those other things that people saw.

But that was neither here nor there. The question was: How do we deal with it? And how do we handle it in such a way that we do not lose sight of our larger interest, which is ensuring that overall peace is maintained and we all don't blow ourselves up. And when I say 'overall peace,' I was taking into account the fact that you don't have overall peace if

the other side is, sort of amoeba-like, going to absorb everything. So I was not ignoring the small actions, but I was trying to put them in perspective.

We clearly had to condemn the invasion of Afghanistan. It was clearly a cooked invitation for them to come in there. We didn't have to do much persuading to get Pakistan and other countries to take the lead in pushing resolutions in the Security Council. Many of the non-aligned countries came forward to condemn the Soviet action on the grounds that they were invading a non-aligned country.

The debate in the Security Council was a long one, a difficult one, a lot of spotlight on it, with the Soviet ambassador, Oleg Troyanovsky, embarrassed, I think, and frustrated. I don't think he had a clue as to why his government acted the way it did. I'm sure, knowing him, that he had his own questions about it. But he was a good, loyal, staunch, Soviet Communist, and the government must have had its reasons.

In the course of the debate, I ridiculed the Soviet explanation. I said they were asking us to adopt an Alice-in-Wonderland view, that somehow the Afghan president invited them in to kill him and take over his government, and that there just happened to be this guy who had been in the Soviet Union, who was Afghan, and who had now taken over.

Well, the Security Council voted against the Soviet invasion. And the thing would have passed, except for the Soviet veto, which was a given.

Interestingly, in the course of the debate, during one of those numerous recesses that used to go on all the time during the Security Council, Troyanovsky came up to me and he said he couldn't understand the United States. Why did we want to throw out the baby with the bath water? This was one of those events which occurs in the course of history, unpleasant, unfortunate, which had to be done. We ought to understand this. We shouldn't over interpret it, nor should we lose sight of our larger interest, all the other things that we're trying to do together to make the world safe, and so forth.

I said to him that I was an advocate of keeping sight of our larger interest, but their actions defied explanation, and there was no way in which the international community could look the other way.

Well, the question, always, when the Security Council is prevented from acting by a vote of one of the permanent powers, is what do you then do?

It was decided to take the Afghanistan question to the General Assembly, under the provisions of the Uniting for Peace resolution.

The Uniting for Peace resolution had been passed in the aftermath of the Korean War. And the reasoning behind it had been that if the Security Council was prevented from taking action because of a veto, it didn't rob the General Assembly of its responsibility with regard to the maintenance of international peace and security. The feeling was that the Security Council had the primary interest to maintain international peace and security, but the implication was that there was a secondary interest someplace else, and that was the General Assembly.

Well, the question then went to the General Assembly, and the vote there was overwhelming. The Assembly also staunchly criticized the invasion of Afghanistan. It didn't name the Soviet Union in the resolution. And its failure to name the Soviet Union was something that right-wing and anti-U.N. people in the United States picked up on and criticized the U.N. for a “double standard” because it wouldn't name the Soviet Union in the resolution, whereas, on the resolutions on Guam or on South Africa, the United States had been named.

I never was that concerned about that kind of thing. Sure, it would have been better to have named the Soviet Union, but I was more interested in the substance of the resolution. There wasn't a soul in the hall or in the international community who didn't know who was being criticized in the resolution. And surely the Soviets didn't miss it.

As in the case of Vietnam's invasion of Cambodia, we carried the day with the non-aligned on the Afghan question.

Which brings me back to Moynihan. He wrote an article in the New York Times in which he criticized the non-aligned about their not voting with the United States. In fact, during his time, they created what subsequently became known, in his administration and later reinvigorated in the Reagan administration, as the AP Squad—"If you don't vote with us, we'll take it out on you in aid programs."

The Times correspondent then did a long piece on me in which he was describing my own methods of operation. In the course of it, he asked Moynihan about his view that these people were anti-U.S. And Moynihan said, "Well, they seem to be more cooperative, and more power to McHenry."

The contrast between what we were able to do with the non-aligned and what had occurred when Moynihan was there and what occurred after I was gone and Jeane Kirkpatrick and others were there, I think, is an indication of, frankly, an understanding of how to operate in multilateral diplomacy.

I don't believe you can persuade people to come to your side by calling them names, by taking rigid ideological positions. Nor is it possible, in our time, given the state of development of the foreign ministries of some countries and their communications capability, to simply appeal to their capitals to get their person to vote the way you want them to vote. It doesn't work. What you have to do is to recognize that the United Nations, like the Congress of the United States, like the British Parliament or the Canadian Parliament or even the Soviet Parliament at the time, is a political body, and you have to learn to work in the political body. And the only way you could work in the political body of the U.N. when I was there was to get to know the delegates, to maintain a dialogue with them, to try to persuade them around to your point of view.

Oh, yes, go to their capitals if you need some kind of reinforcement. But never go to their capital before you've gone to the man on the spot. To go to the capital before you've gone to their representative is to make an enemy of the representative. (A) you make an enemy of him; (B) the capital doesn't know anything about the resolution anyway. They don't have instant communications like the United States and the UK and France and so forth. And sometimes even their representative doesn't know the resolution, because they don't have the kind of staffing that the United States has in the U.N.

I think that, along with a fundamental respect for people, amounted to the difference between our success in dealing with the non-aligned on some of these issues and the failure of Moynihan, at an earlier stage, and of Jeane Kirkpatrick, at a later stage, to be successful in dealing with them.

Q: It's playing to a certain grandstand in the United States.

MCHENRY: Well, to some extent, they're playing domestic politics. And that's fine. But while it may succeed in domestic politics, it doesn't succeed where you want it to, which is in the U.N.

I've always taken the position, as I've looked back, that I would rather have succeeded in ensuring that Guam, for example, not be debated in the U.N., as opposed to seeing it debated and pulling out all the stops and defeating it. I have succeeded if I have made sure that it wasn't debated. I have failed if it gets to the point of debate. I don't measure my success by winning the vote. Now how did I keep it from getting to the point of debate? I defeated it by the contact and the arguments that I used with those representatives. You can succeed or fail, depending on your approach.

Now, to her credit, I think one of the things that Jeane Kirkpatrick discovered, unfortunately after her reputation and image had already been burnished in stone, was that she was

dealing with, in essence, a political body, and said so. But, as I say, unfortunately it was already after her image had been burnished in stone.

Q: Why don't we stop at this point, and I think maybe one more, rather short, interview, talking about human rights, Central America. You went to Nicaragua, Angola. And sort of a summary, although you've given a very good summary now, but of the Carter administration, Brzezinski and others, and your impression of how things went after you left.

Q: Today is the 21st of January, 1994. Don?

MCHENRY: Well, of that list—human rights, Central America, Angola—human rights was an important part of the foreign policy of the Carter administration. I think it stood out mostly because of its sharp contrast with his predecessor's. We had been in a period of realpolitik, and in our zeal to be anti-Communist, we had actually aligned ourselves with some pretty unsavory characters. We were hesitant to speak out against their objectionable practices. And it almost seemed as if the end justified the means; the end being opposition to Communism, and the means being whatever was necessary. So we found ourselves associated with the Marcoses of this world.

Q: Marcos in the Philippines.

MCHENRY: Mobutu in Zaire. Pakistanis. You know, a long list. The Shah of Iran.

Now in some respects, this was not new in American history. We had done this in many other places. But we had reached a point in which the public was more aware of these, and where the self-respect in what the United States stood for was an important part of our arsenal, if you will, against Communism. It was particularly important in terms of the newly developing countries.

I think Carter was on the right track, and I think that his stance on human rights will be one of those items that will stand him in good stead in terms of history.

I do believe that, as in many administrations, the enunciation of a policy and the development of the specific tools and procedures to carry it out are two very different things. There was a tendency, I think, early in the administration, for some, who had heard Mr. Carter's endorsement of human rights, to figure that now this was a happy hunting ground against any and all aspects of American policy of which they disapproved. And, of course, that can't be the case. You have to find some kind of way to preserve the best of one's relationships, while making changes in the worst aspects of them.

The result was that, early in the administration, I think, there was the appearance of absolute confusion over this issue.

President Carter subsequently tried to outline (a) what he meant in terms of human rights, and (b) how they intended to get there.

Christopher did so in a speech.

Q: He was the under secretary.

MCHENRY: And so did Carter himself.

I think the positions that Carter took, particularly on the issues in Southern Africa, on the question of Marcos in the Philippines, the heat that they put on Mobutu in Zaire, were all very important in terms of carrying out the policies that they wished.

Now some would say that the Carter policies led to the rise of despots; that what we got in Iran, for example, was worse than the shah had been.

I would respond to that that what we got in Iran was as a result of the failure to take steps sooner. What we got in Iran was an indictment not of Carter's policies, but of how far the previous administrations had allowed that situation to deteriorate.

I think the same thing is true in Nicaragua. The presence of the Sandinistas and the turn that they took was not an indictment of Carter's going after Somoza (a policy that was approved and concurred in and participated in by other Latin American countries), but it was an indictment of the failure of all of the other administrations before to take a tougher stance with regard to the policies that Somoza had been following.

If you wait too long in these things, you ensure the kind of outcome that we got in Iran and that we got in Nicaragua and that we almost had in the Philippines.

But I continue to believe that it was an important part of the Carter foreign policy. Certainly, as you travel around the world today, Carter is remembered in many of the developing countries of the world for his foreign policy. Now he is not as well liked in the developed countries of Europe. But they are the realpolitik countries, anyway, and have long been reconciled to the sort of cynicism that is present in foreign affairs.

Q: In both your positions in the U.N. during this time, what were you getting from the people you were dealing with at the United Nations? Were the Europeans saying, Come on, get with us, be real? And others from other countries, because they represented the powers that be, were uncomfortable with what we were doing?

MCHENRY: We were applauded at the U.N. by the developing countries. We weren't opposed by our European allies in the developed countries. They are far more sophisticated than that. They sort of support you because you're standing on principle; however, in terms of their own, everyday practice, it's sort of business as usual. Some of that is understandable, because they would also argue that they were trying to find ways in which, as a practical matter, they could promote changes in other countries, too. I think

the difference is that they weren't identified as leaders of the free world. The United States was.

Q: Just as I was walking here, I was thinking that we got a taste of this human rights thing when Citizen Genet came here from Revolutionary France. We're really a very revolutionary country, and we're big enough so that, when we get off on a revolutionary kick, we have an awful lot of influence on them.

MCHENRY: I think so. We have some very important positions of principle in our history. Sometimes they're inconsistent, but nevertheless, they're there. The Declaration of Independence is a pretty radical document, by today's standards.

We were in a situation, particularly with the developing countries of the world, where the question was asked: Are these principles only for yourselves? Don't you stand for these principles when it comes to what goes on elsewhere in your relationships with those governments in power?

It's always a very difficult question, this whole question of human rights, because it stands right at the nexus, if you will, between standing for a universal principle and getting involved in somebody else's business, marching across the line to internal affairs or sovereignty.

Now, mind you, I have never had a problem with that, because I have always felt that we ought to be willing to make sacrifices for our principles. If Country X doesn't wish to change its policy at this stage in history, that is probably their business. But I don't have to have anything to do with Country X. I think we ought to be prepared to regulate the warmth of our relations with countries. And this sometimes means that we have to make sacrifices ourselves. But we can say to countries, “If you wish to go ahead and be an international outcast, that's your business. We don't have to have anything to do with you, or we can reduce the level of our relationship.”

On Angola, this is another typical Cold War item, as far as I'm concerned. The Angolan situation was an outgrowth of decolonization. The Portuguese, in their efforts to stay there, had tried to use the Cold War both as a rationale for being there and as a basis for seeking the support of the United States, particularly, and of other NATO allies. As is typical, instead of making the compromises at the time that they should have made them, they allowed the situation to radicalize. And when change came, both in Portugal and in Angola and Mozambique, it came with an abruptness that had not been expected. In the cases of Angola and Mozambique, it came in terms of governments that were sharply different from the Portuguese government.

The United States, having basically not taken a forward and principled position on the Portuguese territories, suddenly started seeing what was happening in those territories as the spread of Communism, and, first, sought to prevent the regime in Angola from either coming to power or consolidating its power. Under Kissinger, we went so far as to act, in what in effect was an alliance, even with the South Africans, to see that the Communist government of Angola did not come to power or retain power. The fact that that government received help, and continued to receive help, from the Cubans just compounded the situation in the eyes of the Ford administration, and in the eyes of many in the United States. And we started following policies that had us refusing to recognize the Angolan government, providing aid to the opponents of the Angolan government, refusing to allow their seating in the U.N., and a whole series of things of that nature.

Well, I took the position (and I emphasize 'I' because I think my position was somewhat different from Andy Young's) that the Angolan government was afraid of and largely dependent upon the Cubans and Cuban support, in part because it was tied up with the Namibia situation.

The Angolan government was able to rationalize its need for heavy arms imports, rationalize the presence of Cuban forces, by citing the threat that they saw coming from

South Africa through Namibia, and from the United States in South Africa through support of the opposition forces in Angola.

Now the United States and South Africa argued the other way around, that this Angolan Communist government could stay in power only because of the Cuban presence and the Soviet aid.

I did not believe that we could get a true test of the Angolan situation until we robbed both sides of their rationalizations, of their ability to point to the other for the continued existence of problems.

My belief was that if we could resolve the Namibia question, that would remove the South Africans. It would remove any reason for South African support of the Angolan government's opponents. And it would remove any rationalization on the part of Angola for the presence of Cuban forces. Finally, Angolan and Angolan would have to come face to face with one another. The opposition forces could no longer say that the only reason that the government stayed in power was because of external support. And the government could no longer say that it needed external support because of the opposition's getting external support. Each would have to come to grips with the existence of the other (the legitimate existence of the other, from my point of view). The government was not going to wipe out Savimbi, and Savimbi was not going to wipe out the government. They would have to come to grips with the need for some kind of accommodation.

So it was largely through trying to resolve the Namibia question that we tried to do something about Angola.

We did that in Namibia. And we did that over in Zaire, trying to prevent the Zairian president from continuing to throw stones at the Angolan government and leaving the Angolans with a rationalization for attacking Zaire.

I think Andy agreed with that view. But Andy had a way of expressing his views that really undercut what we were trying to do. You remember, at the very beginning of the administration, he made the statement about the Cubans being a “positive force” in Angola. He wasn't completely wrong. They had provided medical care. They had helped the government bring some semblance of structure and technical operation, about which the Angolans knew nothing. And, frankly, they had helped keep Savimbi and others from completely overrunning the place. But to say it in the way that Andy said it was to invite the right wing, the anti-Cuban forces in the United States, to come down on his head and on the president's head like a ton of bricks.

Unfortunately, the administration was split on this question of Angola. And Angola was only representative of a larger split, to which I've referred earlier. For Brzezinski, Angola was a way of countering the Soviet threat, and it was a way of advancing the American position, by getting rid of the Cubans. From a domestic political point of view, this was a very difficult issue for the president, because the anti-Cuban forces in the United States looked upon Cuba's presence in Angola as just an indication of the mischief that Cuba was up to. Even those who were concerned about nuclear questions looked upon the Cuban presence as a menace. I mean, after all, Angola was one of the reasons given for the failure of detente. I don't think detente failed, but it was one of the reasons that was given for the failure of detente.

The result was that there was a sort of standoff in the administration with regard to Angola. True, we continued to pursue the policy of trying to resolve the Namibia question, of making sure that Angola wasn't attacked from Zaire. But the desire on the part of the secretary of state, Vance, and of his ambassador to the U.N., Young, and my own view, that we ought to recognize the Angolan government, ran into constant difficulty.

And the difficulty was always a rather sophisticated bureaucratic game. Brzezinski never would, so far as I know, with Vance or with me or Andy, take head on his opposition to recognition of Angola. Rather, what he would do would be to, in essence, play games. If

you'd say, “We need to take the step of recognition now, because the Angolans are helpful to us in the Namibia negotiations, because we need to maintain some kind of dialogue with them, because we need to take the first step towards stabilizing the situation in the area,” Brzezinski would argue, “Well, we ought to do that, Mr. President, but right now you have items one, two, three, and four on your professional platter, and you don't want to overload it.” Or he would say, “We ought to recognize, Mr. President, but let's condition the recognition on the Angolans doing A, B, C, and D.” Well, the conditions were always unacceptable, and he knew it. Or he would say, “We ought to recognize, Mr. President, but you need to consult with Senator Jones,” or Hudson, or whoever the hell it might be. And these were always people with whom consultation was almost impossible. You could not consult with them privately. The first thing they would do would be to go out and hold a public press conference and stir up opposition. So I don't think I ever saw him supportive of recognition. It was always done in such a way that, in effect, it would ensure that it didn't get done.

Q: One does get the feeling that he and Kissinger are almost twins, in many ways.

MCHENRY: Oh, I think, in many respects, they hold the same views. I think many of Brzezinski's came out a little more after he'd left office. But I think, in many respects, they're not much different in terms of their views.

The Angolans continued to be very helpful in the Namibian negotiations. I went to Angola on a number of occasions. As a matter of fact, I was the first American to go there after the United States pulled out of Angola, in the Ford administration. I went there in connection with the negotiations on Namibia, but obviously, I had two other things on my agenda when I went. The Angolans were very friendly and receptive. We went in an American Air Force plane. We had the other four members of the contact group on board, but nevertheless, the arrival of an American Air Force plane in a place where we had so recently been involved in trying to unseat the government was an event.

The two things that I had on my agenda, in addition to the Namibia negotiations, were, first, the treatment of and hopefully the release of some American soldiers of fortune who had been captured during the Angolan conflict. The Angolans allowed me to see these chaps, to establish some kind of contact, to facilitate the regular visits to them by the Italians, who were representing American interests there. And very shortly thereafter, these chaps were released from the prison. They had been caught red-handed in the supporting efforts to unseat the Angolan government. The Angolans very easily could have kept them in jail for life, or, worse, they could have executed them. But they were released.

Secondly, we had long discussions with the prime minister and the foreign minister about U.S.-Angolan relations. I think that, throughout the four years of the Carter administration, we had a very warm working relationship with the Angolans. I worked with the Angolan president on a rapprochement with Zaire, so that we wouldn't have a Shaba III after we'd had those two large incidents on the border, and facilitated a meeting between the two of them, where there was, in essence, an agreement that neither would attack from either side of that border. And even on Namibia, the breakthrough agreement with SWAPO was one that we reached in Angola. Had champagne there as we celebrated SWAPO's agreement to Resolution 435.

Unfortunately, I think much of that became unraveled once Carter was gone. The Reagan administration pursued one of the most peculiar policies that I've ever heard of. They said they wanted to have a Cuban withdrawal. And to get a Cuban withdrawal, they helped the opposition to the Angolan government, Savimbi, reduced the pressure on the South Africans on Namibia, and allowed the South Africans to carry on large-scaled operations in Angola. The upshot of it all was that the Angolan government became more dependent upon the Cubans and the Russians. So, instead of getting the Cubans out, they followed a policy that, for the next eight to twelve years, into the Bush administration, made the Angolans more dependent upon the Cubans and the Russians. It was the weirdest policy that I have ever seen.

Ironically, the whole situation in Angola and Namibia got its major break largely, 90 percent, as a result of the arrival of more Cubans, so many Cubans that the South Africans became concerned that they might get embroiled in a fight inside of Namibia, and therefore now were interested in a peaceful transition in Namibia.

Angola was very much a part of the negotiations on Namibia, very much a part of the agreement that we finally reached on Namibia, which, though held up in implementation for the 12 years of the Reagan and Bush administrations, still was the basis for Namibian independence.

I think Angola, frankly, is an example of what not to do in foreign policy. I have not been a supporter of the non-recognition policies of the United States. I've always believed that the one great present that Mr. Ford could have given to Carter, and Carter to Reagan, and Reagan to Bush, and so forth, would have been to get rid of this policy, to recognize Vietnam and Angola and Cuba and any other country, so that the process of communication doesn't get mixed up with political acceptance and approval. That's true with countries we don't recognize; it's also true with groups that we won't talk with. I think it was a shame that, on the plane going to Sadat's funeral, presidents Carter and Nixon and Ford could be in agreement that they should have had conversations with the PLO, and yet, when each was in office, they were afraid to do so.

Q: This is a policy that we got into under Wilson and have never really gotten out of. It's one of our weapons that has proven to be extremely ineffective.

MCHENRY: It just doesn't make sense. You don't solve problems by refusing to talk with people. I think Rabin, the Israeli prime minister, put it correctly when he finally started talking with the PLO. He said to those who criticized him, “After all, you don't have to make peace with your friends. You've got to talk with your enemies.”

Q: Well, getting to Central America and the fall of Somoza. Nicaragua was really the issue at the time. What was your involvement?

MCHENRY: I wasn't deeply involved in that question. Central America was largely handled in the context of the Organization of American States. The policy with regard to Somoza was handled by Ambassador Bowdler the last two years of the Carter administration, a man I came to know and respect when he was Ambassador of the United States in South Africa. I had worked very closely with him on the Namibia negotiations. He had been extraordinarily supportive and knowledgeable. So, when he came back to Washington and headed up the Bureau of Inter-American Affairs, I was one of his cheerleaders.

We at the U.N. got into Central America in a couple of ways. Obviously, the Nicaraguans were present at the U.N., and they frequently got sufficiently teed off with the United States, once the Sandinistas were in power, that they created mischief on a number of occasions. We also had the presence of the new Grenada regime, once there was a change there. [West Indies; not Central America.] But for the most part, we didn't have the question of Central America in the U.N.

I got involved in detail with Nicaragua in the period leading up to and during the first anniversary of the revolution. The president asked me to go to Nicaragua to head the American delegation on the anniversary of the revolution. The United States government at the time was handling a very tricky situation with the new Nicaraguan government. On the one hand, we had opposed the Somoza government. We didn't exactly like the new people coming in, didn't like some of their rhetoric, but we hoped that, once in power, they would act responsibly and that we might do some things that would help ease the way. So we didn't want to distance ourselves from that new regime. And being present on the anniversary of the revolution was sort of a part of that policy. So I went there as head of the delegation and had some very interesting conversations with the Nicaraguans, and a fascinating conversation with Fidel Castro.

Q: I didn't know one could have a conversation with him, because he is a monologist extraordinary.

MCHENRY: Well, he is. At that time, however, 14 years ago, he was reasonably amenable. I think he still had some hope that there would be some kind of change. He had some feeling of power. He has very little feeling of power now.

We spoke one evening, at a reception, actually, and needless to say, we had the press all around. There were the two of us, trying to carry on a conversation away from the intrusion of microphones and other ears.

He said that he had told the Nicaraguans that they shouldn't make the same mistake that he had made. That they should not get the United States so furious at them because of their positions and practices that they didn't get a chance to establish themselves and put into place the kind of government and institutions that they wanted to have. He didn't believe that they needed to antagonize the United States.

Now this was strange, coming from a man who was proud and who, I suspect, would argue that his revolution was a success and who loves to pull Uncle Sam's beard. But he was sort of counseling, or at least that's what he said to me, that he was counseling.

He said the second thing (you have to remember, this was 1980 and there was soon to be an election in the United States), that he had his own views about the American presidential election, but he dare not express them, because if he did, it would be poison for the candidate that he hoped would win. But he made it clear that that was Jimmy Carter.

I had one other occasion for discussion with Castro, again, of all places, in a very public session. We were at the U.N. in the fall of '80. I had been in Geneva that summer at a session of the Economic and Social Council of the U.N. and was seated in the Assembly, listening to an absolute tirade from the Cuban ambassador. I mean, it was as anti-

American a tirade and as off the subject and the agenda as you could get. He went on and on and on.

Early during this tirade, I put up my hand to get the attention of the president, signaling him that I wanted to exercise the right of reply. But as the tirade went on and on and on and on, I came to the conclusion that I would not exercise the right of reply, because (a) no one was listening to him, and (b) they'd all dismissed what he was saying. If I gave a reply, I would simply be dignifying what he had said, giving it more attention than it was ever going to get otherwise.

So after he'd finished and the president of the Council called upon me, I said, “Mr. President, when I put up my hand, I wanted to exercise the right of reply. But the more I listened, the more I concluded that there was nothing to which to reply. Thank you very much.” And I never said another word.

I was suddenly surrounded in the Council by all kinds of representatives, who came up, telling me I'd really put the Cuban representative in his place.

Well, back to Castro. We were at the U.N. and Castro was there as the head of the non-aligned movement. I went down the line, and the secretary-general said, “I want to introduce you to...”

And Castro said, “(A) we've met. (B) this is the gentleman who put my ambassador in his place.”

So he had something of a sense of humor.

I've always felt that the Nicaraguan situation was a sad one. As I said, it's the perfect example of where the failure to act soon enough ensures, ensures that you get an even worse government.

Q: In other words, we let Somoza go. Because obviously we had controls there, but we never really exercised them.

MCHENRY: Well, I don't know that we had controls. But we could have distanced ourselves from him. We could have been more critical of him. We could have dispelled any view that he was there with our approval.

I would repeat, to those who say that we got a worse situation in Iran and Nicaragua, it wasn't because of the actions that we took, it was the failure to take those same actions earlier and more forcefully.

Q: What happened when you left? Was there an earth change in the United Nations at that point, with the Reagan administration?

MCHENRY: I think, when I left, we went back, frankly, to the days of Moynihan, without his redeeming features. Moynihan, as you know, was followed by Scranton. Scranton sought to improve relations, to repair some of the crockery that Moynihan had kicked over when he arrived. Young and I tried to continue that repair.

When Jeane Kirkpatrick, who succeeded me, and Reagan came along, they came along with preconceived ideas of how to get along in the U.N. and the world. Oh, you could see it from the very first day. To whom did Jeane Kirkpatrick turn for her advice in terms of helping her get started, helping her get set? Moynihan's group, or the Commentary crowd.

Q: Commentary is a magazine.

MCHENRY: It's sort of neo-conservative. Former Democrats edit it, who on two issues, on the Soviet Union and Israel, were as hardline as you could get, and were so hardline on those issues that they were sometimes willing to compromise, and indeed I think did compromise, on some domestic issues where they liked to think that they were very liberal.

I think, in a period of time, they learned some lessons, but it was very difficult. They went through needless name-calling, needless isolation of themselves, went through a period when even our closest allies did not like the way in which we acted, nor the specific policy positions that we took.

Q: Did they turn to you at the beginning for any advice on how to get along or anything like that?

MCHENRY: No. I spent the better part of a day with Ambassador Kirkpatrick during the transition period. I invited her to New York. We had a very long session at the residence in the Waldorf. I went through a whole series of staffing and policy questions with her. I'm inclined to believe that she almost took the opposite on everything that I said.

I think, slowly but surely, there were lessons learned. It was very interesting to hear that Ambassador Kirkpatrick later said that she had discovered that the U.N. General Assembly was a parliamentary body, that it was a political institution. Well, that's a given. It's just like the Congress of the United States. More difficult to handle, because in the Congress, you can actually affect programs and money, whereas in the U.N., you can only in the short term affect recommendations and that kind of thing.

Relations between the United States and the developing countries became much more difficult. The developing countries were seen as anti-American. We had turned that around during the Carter administration. We had turned it around so dramatically that even Moynihan told the New York Times, in a Sunday magazine article, that he was surprised that we had been able to turn around the Assembly. But all of that went down the tubes.

Some policies were instituted that have had and will continue to have a long-term effect on the United Nations. It was not simply sort of returning name calls. We became selective on what programs we would pay for and wouldn't pay for, which is the same thing we had

criticized the Soviet Union for doing, historically. We withheld funds from the U.N., in clear violation of our treaty obligations.

Instead of following the slow but steady process of trying to build an institution, we started setting examples in the opposite direction. I think that the administration came very close to destroying the U.N.

And I had occasion to speak with the then-deputy secretary of state, to tell him as much. John Whitehead, who was deputy secretary of state in the latter portion of the Reagan administration, had been a friend of mine from Outward Bound days. We've gone on a number of Outward Bound trips. And though in general the administration had not sought my advice (with the exception of the under secretary for political affairs, Armacost, whom I had known as a career officer), I decided on one occasion to go in to see Whitehead.

I went in to see him, and I said, “John, I know this administration has left the United Nations and U.N. affairs in the hands of the right wing. You can't help but see that the right wing is not simply crippling the organization, it might destroy it. I don't believe that you or Ronald Reagan want to go down in history as having destroyed the U.N. You'd better pay more attention to what is going on.”

Well, Whitehead then decided he would pay more attention to what was going on on the Sixth Floor, and one of the things he would do would be to exercise more supervision over the assistant secretary of state for International Organization Affairs. He proceeded to do that. Then the whole thing broke into the public domain, because the assistant secretary was resistant to supervision, didn't want it, finally resigned, and accused Whitehead of being a racist, because he was supervising this area of the State Department.

Now the fact that I had gone to Whitehead and so forth is not widely known. But it is widely known that this is the point at which, I think, it can be said that the administration started

turning around, started paying more attention, trying to take a more constructive and positive role.

Q: Who was the assistant secretary at that time?

MCHENRY: It was Alan Keyes. Alan Keyes had been a black, Harvard Ph.D., rather outspoken. He had been a low-ranking Foreign Service officer at the time that the Reagan administration came into office, and had been pulled from the Foreign Service, first to Policy Planning, and then, suddenly, to ambassador to the U.N. for Economic and Social Affairs. And then, later on in the Reagan administration, he had been named assistant secretary for International Organization Affairs. But he was only one of the crowd. The fact is that the policy was in the hands of the Heritage Foundation neo-conservatives, some of whom were anti-U.N., some of whom weren't anti-U.N., but didn't like the policies.

Q: It's a little bit reminiscent of the Eisenhower administration, in which Far Eastern policy seemed to be turned over to the right wing as long as Eisenhower could take a fairly positive, liberal approach, you might say, to Europe. You leave one of these areas as raw meat to the Neanderthals.

MCHENRY: I think that's what happens sometimes, that you don't want to take on one of these groups.

Q: How do you feel the thrust of American policy towards the United Nations has been going?

MCHENRY: Well, I think, historically, something like the United Nations will have its ups and downs. It's important for the United States to have some vision about the U.N. as an institution, and about the development of international norms, international rules and regulations that will facilitate interactions among nations, try to improve the world, and develop and maintain the peace.

This is a long-term project. It requires leadership. That leadership, it has been proven, has to come from the United States. If we lose sight of the vision and in essence join the detractors of the world, then we're all headed for trouble. I think, for the first 35 years of the U.N., there were ups and downs, but I would say, until 1981, we were exercising that leadership. That was true of Democrats and Republicans. I think we got off the tracks. We started getting back on them during the latter part of the Bush administration, but we were off the tracks.

Now there will be those who will say, well, the world improved; some of our practices in the U.N. were effective; we won over Communism, and all that kind of thing.

If we succeed in building the U.N., it won't be because of the constitutions that were made in that period. We ran a very risky policy, and it will take us a long time to recover.

In fact, now, when the Cold War is over and there are marvelous opportunities for the U.N., it is faced with the setbacks that it saw in the 1980s. It is deeply in debt. It has not been able to get the best and the brightest from the world, because the UN was so marginalized. It did not begin the modernization that it should have undertaken, in part because it was in debt and marginalized. And so, in this period of great opportunity, when the U.N. ought to be used as a way of leaping forward on problems, it's not able to do so. It now has... the building that should have been done in the 80s. Or at least in the 80s it should have been able to hold its own, and it didn't do so.

I think it's time now for us reassert the vision. But more than simply reassert the vision, we need to put some meat on the bones. We need to come up with the practical ideas that will show ourselves and the rest of the world that we mean business.

I'm afraid that there is a tendency, in the early days of the Clinton administration, to reassert the vision, but to not have done the kind of homework that is necessary to begin

to ensure that the steps are taken towards realization of the vision. It's not simply an assertion of the vision, it is also trying to develop the practical ways of getting there.

This is something, again, that the Carter administration had to learn. It's not simply the assertion of your rights, it is how do you stick to your principle in terms of human rights in the unruly world in which we live?

End of interview